

Teacher Mindset Training

This is one of a series of evidence-based strategies to help states and school districts invest Covid relief aid effectively. Read all 18 strategies in FutureEd's [Covid Relief Playbook](#).

The way teachers treat students, and their beliefs and biases about students' abilities, have a profound impact on student well-being and achievement. Students who feel respected and supported by their teachers demonstrate greater confidence in their ability to learn and are more motivated to tackle demanding classwork. For students transitioning back to classrooms and readjusting to school routines post-pandemic, strong, supportive relationships with teachers will be especially important.

THE RESEARCH

Several teacher mindset training interventions have been found to improve student performance. A 2018 [study](#) from the Stanford Graduate School of Education investigated the impact of the Mathematical Mindset Approach, which encompasses professional learning on new brain science that challenges the "math person" myth and instructional strategies for teaching math. Forty fifth-grade teachers in eight school districts in California underwent 30-40 hours of online modules as attended seven in-person meetings to learn the approach. After one year, interviews, teacher surveys, and assessment data indicated positive improvements in students' beliefs, teacher's instructional practice, and on students' math test scores. The greatest gains were from girls, English language learners, low-income students, and other students from populations typically underrepresented in advanced math classes and math professions.

The Perspectives Experience Program, or PEP, developed by psychologist Jason Okonofua and researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, is another effective intervention to address teacher bias and its impact on

student outcomes. PEP enrolls teachers and students in two online modules over a span of six months. Teachers are asked to consider student perspectives and needs to shift teacher mindsets about minority students and encourage them to examine their approaches to discipline. Okonofua and his fellow researchers reported in a 2016 [study](#) that PEP cut suspension rates in half over the course of the year. As students return to the classroom after experiencing various challenges throughout the pandemic, strategies such as PEP can help schools avoid unduly harsh disciplinary approaches.

Another teacher-mindset intervention targets the influence of teachers on students' belief in their own abilities. Teachers' subconscious biases often come out through their feedback to students. David Yeager from the University of Texas, Austin demonstrated the importance of teachers using "wise feedback" to communicate their high expectations and belief in student ability through their responses to essays and other assignments. In a 2013 [study](#), Yeager and his colleagues found that wise feedback increased students' likelihood of revising their essays to receive a better grade through three randomized field experiments. Training teachers to give wise feedback shows promise for reducing biases in teacher response to student work and improving student achievement.

The BARR model—Building Assets Reducing Risks—has improved academic success by building teacher-student relationships and tracking student data. Under the model, schools place high school freshmen together in small groups for English, math, social studies, and science classes. Teachers get professional development on how to use their relationships with students to enhance

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achievement. They also meet weekly to discuss student successes and approaches that will build stronger relationships within the groups. A rigorous 2015 [study](#) of the BARR model for the U.S. Education Department found improvements across a national sample of schools in test scores, credits earned, and grade point averages, and a decline in failure rates.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

There are several other ways schools can strengthen student-teacher relationships, including prioritizing small-group experiences for students through teacher-led “advisories.” Home visits are another way to build relationships between teachers, students, and families, and potentially reduce teacher bias and enhance empathy. And Stanford Graduate School’s Complex Instruction model can help combat implicit biases about which students could be successful at math by using groupwork to emphasize equal-status interactions among students and specific conditions under which teachers can establish and support these interactions.

RESEARCH

- [Achieving Elusive Teacher Change through Challenging Myths about Learning: A Blended Approach: **PROMISING**](#)
- [Brief Intervention to Encourage Empathic Discipline Cuts Suspension Rates in Half Among Adolescents: **PROMISING**](#)
- [Breaking the Cycle of Mistrust: Wise Interventions to Provide Critical Feedback Across the Racial Divide: **PROMISING**](#)
- [The Building Assets Reducing Risks Program: **STRONG**](#)

RESOURCES

- [TEACHER MINDSETS: How Educators’ Perspectives Shape Student Success](#)
- [Complex Instruction](#)