

# The basis of all the other things

What can teachers do to have the greatest impact on students' perceptions about how safe and fair their school seems and how the students and teachers get along?

UD Professor [George Bear](#), an advisor to CDS's [Positive Behavior Support \(DE-PBS\)](#) project, asked this very question in a 2017 article published in [Teaching and Teacher Education](#). Not surprisingly, he found, students rate their school's climate higher if they report they are punished less and praised more. Not as expected was the even stronger impact on school climate linked to students' perceptions that they are being taught to manage their emotions and recognize how others think and feel – examples of what educators call social and emotional competencies (SEC).

Recognizing the growing importance of SEC, the DE-PBS Project expanded the [Delaware School Climate Surveys](#) to investigate further. Supported by the [Delaware Department of Education \(DDOE\)](#), DE-PBS administers the surveys annually to approximately 150 schools. The additions asked students to rate their abilities in self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making – four of the five aspects of SEC as defined by the [Collaboration for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#). For the 2019-2020 school year, DE-PBS has added questions about the fifth aspect, self-awareness.

This is key, says [Capital School District](#) School Improvement Specialist and former PBS Coach LaWanda Burgoyne, because it will help educators grasp how well students understand their own emotions and motivations.

Burgoyne spearheaded a push to focus on students' social and emotional development in the Capital School District, as did educators in several other districts. To broaden their reach, the DDOE created the statewide [Social-Emotional Learning Collaborative](#), a diverse group of educators, DDOE staff, community members and policymakers, including Bear and CDS's director of PreK-12 initiatives [Debby Boyer](#). The Collaborative joined CASEL's [Collaborating States Initiative](#), which provides resources and guidance from colleagues across the country.

Being taught SEC and honing “the ability to be self-aware,” says Burgoyne, who is also the Collaborative co-lead, “are really the basis of all the other things we try to [help students learn] and do.”



George Bear with Angela Soltys, a former CDS graduate assistant and a co-author with Bear on a 2017 article in *Teaching and Teacher Education*.