Schools as hubs for social and emotional learning – Are schools and teachers ready?

Schools are perfect hubs for social and emotional learning, but are they ready for this task? To address this question, this Spotlight reports previously unpublished findings from the OECD's Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) and discusses their implications for education policy and practice. The findings are based on an analysis of the survey responses collected from principals and teachers in nine cities from different countries and regions of the world.

Results indicate that developing social and emotional skills is acknowledged as an aim of schools as much as promoting academic skills. However, the former are less commonly evaluated than the latter. Schools mainly embed social and emotional promotion into their general practices, while activities and lessons with a specific focus on learning these skills are less common. Both an active promotion in schools and extensive learning opportunities for teachers on relevant topics provide a fertile ground for an effective social and emotional education. They boost teachers' self-efficacy and use of active learning pedagogies, as well as quality relationships at school.

The Spotlight also points to important differences for teachers of 10- vs. 15-year-old students that can explain higher skills at a younger age. Younger students benefit more often from key elements of an effective social and emotional education in school, i.e. the evaluation of their social and emotional skills and teachers teaming up with parents to reinforce skill promotion. Teachers of 10-year-olds are also more intensively trained and requested to promote social and emotional learning in their work.

Today more than ever, it has become clear that social and emotional skills are indispensable for a peaceful and prosperous future, and for the cohesion of societies. They predict important life outcomes in various domains such as academic achievement, employment and health (OECD, 2015[1]; Sánchez Puerta, Valerio and Gutiérrez Bernal, 2016[2]). This has made them a top priority of many countries, eager to learn more about these skills and means of promoting them. To address this, the OECD has launched the international Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES). In 2019, the SSES studied the creativity, curiosity, empathy, co-operation and other social and emotional skills of 10- and 15-year-old students in nine cities from different regions of the world, including: Bogotá (Colombia), Daegu (Korea), Helsinki (Finland), Houston (United States), Istanbul (Republic of Türkiye – hereinafter "Türkiye"), Manizales (Colombia), Ottawa (Canada), Sintra (Portugal) and Suzhou (People's Republic of China – hereinafter "China"). Its international report shed light on how social and emotional skills differ by gender, social background and age; and how they matter for student outcomes such as academic performance, career expectations and well-being (OECD, 2021[3]).

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Yet there is still a great need to better understand the learning environments, such as schools, that help students acquire and refine social and emotional skills. School is the perfect hub for social and emotional learning. It is a microcosm of society, where students are confronted with different ways of thinking, living and communicating. School offers opportunities to experience success, build trusting relationships, even friendships, and learn that one's own success often depends on others. At school, students must not only handle complex social situations every day but also pressure, frustration and, eventually, failure and rejection.

The outcome of such experiences at schools depends also on their teachers. They play a key role in creating a school and classroom environment that nurtures students' social and emotional development. Teachers can provide students opportunities to work and debate in groups, be creative, and feel and express joy and pride while learning. They can mentor and guide students on how to resolve conflicts that inevitably arise along the way, and draw students' attention to the needs of others.

International evidence on the readiness of schools and teachers for this task is, however, still missing. This Spotlight fills this gap by reporting on previously unpublished findings from the SSES, which are based on an analysis of the responses of the principals and teachers that participated the survey in 2019. More specifically, it examines whether schools acknowledge social and emotional skills as important aims of education, that are actively promoted and evaluated. The Spotlight additionally explores if teachers have received sufficient training for transforming schools into socially and emotionally nurturing environments. The Spotlight sets a particular focus on identifying differences between schools and teachers of 15- vs. 10-year-old students that could explain the dip in social and emotional skills at age 15 reported in the SSES international report (OECD, 2021[3]): students at age 15, regardless of their gender or socio-economic background, reported lower social and emotional skills than students at age 10. Differences were particularly pronounced for optimism, trust, energy and sociability. Data collected from teachers and schools of 10-year-olds provide information on the promotion of social and emotional skills in primary and lower secondary education. Data collected from teachers and schools of 15-year-olds, on the other hand, correspond to the promotion of these skills in lower, middle or upper secondary education, depending on the education system.

Do schools acknowledge social and emotional learning as an important aim?

To exercise their potential as hubs of social and emotional learning, schools need to acknowledge that academic achievements and emotional and social learning are two sides of the same coin, contributing to students' academic careers and life success. By now, most countries have listed the development of social and emotional skills as an aim in their education curriculum or in similar documents (e.g. guidelines, constitutions) (OECD, 2021[4]). However, often a disconnect exists between those written curricula and the attained curriculum (i.e. the actual social and emotional development of students in school) (OECD, 2020[5]). A first important step to understand such a disconnect is to look at how school leaders and teachers interpret and understand the curriculum, and if the aims of schools are aligned with the official curriculum.

Data from the SSES indicate that the majority of schools intend to implement the official curricula: on average across SSES-participating cities (hereafter "cities"), over 90% of 10- and 15-year-old students were enrolled in schools whose principals "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the promotion of social and emotional skills is an aim of their school (Figure 1). Importantly, results are not notably different from those obtained for academic achievement.

Figure 1. Students' social and emotional skills and academic achievement as aims of schools

Percentage of students whose principal agreed or strongly agreed that social and emotional skills and academic achievement are aims of their school
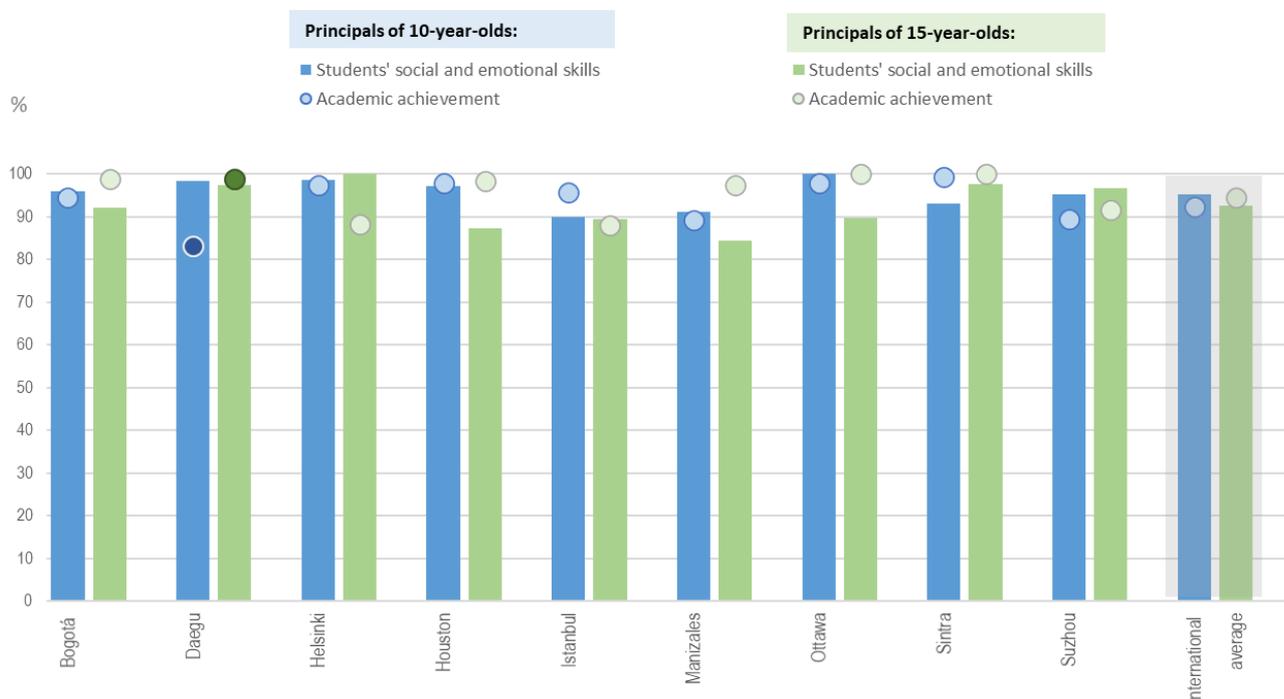
Note: Data for Sintra (Portugal) and Ottawa (Canada) did not reach response rate standards and are not included in international averages. All differences between the 10- and 15-year-old cohorts are not significant except the difference for academic performance in Daegu (Korea), marked in a darker tone.
Source: *OECD, SSES 2019 Database, Table A1.*

Across cities, the share of 10-year-old students in schools aiming for social and emotional skill development are quite similar, ranging from 90% in Istanbul (Türkiye) and 91% in Manizales (Colombia) to 99% in Helsinki (Finland) and 100% in Ottawa (Table A1). For 15-year-olds, larger cross-city differences are observed, varying between 84% in Manizales (Colombia) and 100% in Helsinki (Finland). In most cities, slightly more 10-year-olds compared to 15-year-olds attended schools that had social and emotional development as an aim (according to principals' reports). The opposite is true for academic achievements: in the majority of cities, more 15-year-olds were in schools that focused on students' academic development compared to 10-year-olds. Yet the percentage-point difference is only significant in Daegu (Korea) for academic achievement as a school aim.

Are social and emotional skills evaluated in schools, and are results shared with key stakeholders?

Decreasing discrepancies between the written and attained curriculum requires thorough and systematic evaluations and assessments of students' skills in schools (OECD, 2013[6]). Information on where students stand in their learning and how they have progressed helps teachers adjust their teaching methods to their needs to insure the maximum amount of learning for each student. Data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018, for example, show that schools that systematically record students' test results and graduation rates have higher attainments in reading (OECD, 2020[7]). Similarly, teachers' time spent on marking and correcting student work – an indicator of teachers' involvement in student assessments – is an important predictor of students' achievement in reading, mathematics and

science, as found by the 2018 PISA-TALIS (Teacher and Learning International Survey) link study (OECD, 2021[8]). In the same way that assessments are important for schools' academic attainment, they are key for determining and making visible the social and emotional progress students make, or the areas in need of improvement. Consequently, such assessments can be used to deliberately change practices in schools to promote social and emotional learning.

However, a contrast between PISA 2018 results for academic achievement and data from the SSES suggests that social and emotional learning is still not equally well-monitored in schools. According to PISA data, some 93% of students across OECD countries and economies were in schools whose principals reported that they systematically record students' test results and graduation rates (OECD, 2020[7]). Only in a few countries and economies the percentages are below 85%. In contrast, the SSES data collected from teachers reveal that on average across cities, only 66% of all 15-year-old students attended a school that evaluates social and emotional skills, either using informal evaluations (e.g. oral reports to students or parents, etc.) or formal evaluations (e.g. written reports, grades, etc.) (Table A2). The share is higher for 10-year-olds: around 75% of students attended a school that assesses these skills. The share drops below 50% in Daegu (Korea) and Ottawa (Canada) for 15-year-olds, while the shares of 10-year-olds in all cities remain above 50% and are lowest in Houston (United States) (51%) and Daegu (Korea) (57%). Notably, on average, the social and emotional skills of one in three 15-year-old students and one in four 10-year-old students are not assessed in school.

> Evaluations and assessments of students' social and emotional skills help teachers provide tailored support and feedback. To serve a broader purpose, however, results need to be shared with key school stakeholders.

Clearly, assessments of students' skills serve teachers as important sources of information to provide tailored support and feedback to students (OECD, 2021[8]; OECD, 2013[6]). To serve a broader purpose, however, assessment results need to be shared and used beyond classroom walls. Sharing such information with parents, for instance, can help to raise interest in their child's development and, thus, strengthen parental involvement in students' social and emotional learning. Parental involvement has been highlighted as a building block of effective social and emotional education (Sánchez Puerta, Valerio and Gutiérrez Bernal, 2016[2]; OECD, 2015[1]). It is also a principal lever of equity: according to system-level results from PISA 2018, countries and economies using student assessments to inform parents about their child's progress tend to show greater equity in education in terms of reading performance (OECD, 2020[7]).

PISA 2018 further identified informing parents about their child's progress as the most frequent use of assessments of students' academic skills. As much as 95% of students were in schools whose principal reported that assessments are used for this purpose (OECD, 2020[7]). Similarly, findings from the SSES teacher data reveals that, on average across cities, parents are the main recipients of teachers' reports or observations on students' social and emotional skills (Figure 2, Table A2). Notwithstanding, significantly more 10-year-olds than 15-year-olds were taught by teachers who submit their reports on students' social and emotional skills to parents. This was the case for 90% (10-year-olds) and 84% (15-year-olds) of the students with teachers who evaluate social and emotional skills.

Differences between cities are relatively modest, though larger for 15-year-old students. The proportion of students whose teachers submit their reports or observations to parents is below 85% for the 15-year-olds in all but three cities, i.e. Bogotá (Colombia), Manizales (Colombia) and Ottawa (Canada). In contrast, the same percentage is higher than 85% for 10-year-olds in all cities but Daegu (Korea) and Sintra (Portugal).

Figure 2. Sharing evaluations of students' social and emotional skills with key stakeholders

Percentage of students whose teachers reported the submission of reports or observations on students' social and emotional skills to the following stakeholders (international average)
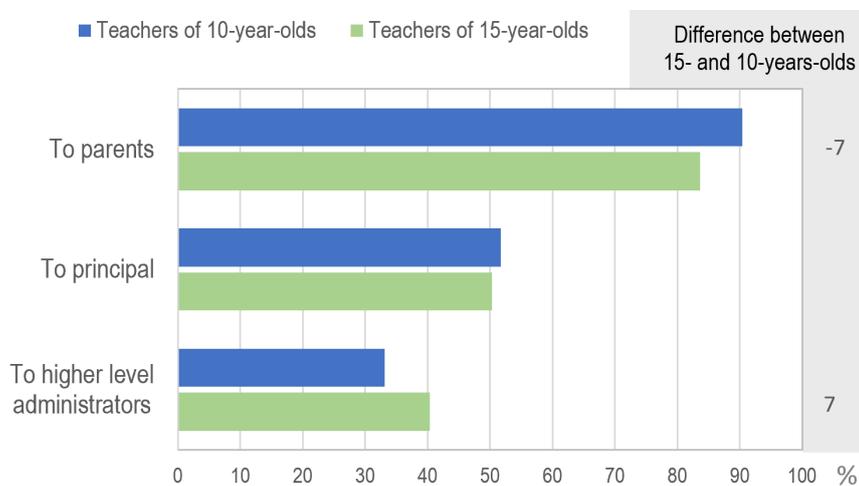
Note: Data for Ottawa (Canada) and Sintra (Portugal) did not reach response rate standards and are not included in international averages. Differences between the 10- and 15-year-old cohorts that are not significant are not shown.
Source: *OECD, SSES 2019 Database, Table A2.*

Student skill assessment serves purposes beyond meeting the information needs of parents. They are also a valuable source of information for guiding school policies and practices (OECD, 2013[6]). Information on students' academic performance is, for example, commonly used for teacher appraisal (OECD, 2020[9]). A contribution to improvements not only at the classroom level but also school and system level requires that assessment data be shared with school principals as well as higher-order decision makers and administrators. Findings from the SSES teacher data suggest that there is room for increasing the use of social and emotional skill assessments beyond the classroom level. On average across cities, only around half of all students of both age groups had teachers who submit their reports and evaluations to their principals. Yet the proportion ranges substantially between cities, from close to 25% in Daegu (Korea) and Helsinki (Finland), to over 75% in Istanbul (Türkiye) for both age groups.

Percentages are even lower for higher-order administrators. On average, only 40% of all 15-year-olds who are evaluated in terms of their social and emotional skills have their evaluations shared with higher-order administrators. The share is again considerably lower compared to what has been reported for academic achievement in PISA, and the share would be lower still if it referred to all students – those evaluated and not evaluated. PISA 2018 reported that 67% of all 15-year-old students on average across OECD countries and economies were in schools where achievement data are tracked over time by an administrative authority (OECD, 2020[7]). For 10-year-old students, an even lower share is observed (at 33%, the difference from 15-year-old students of 7 percentage points is significant).

Interestingly, cross-city differences for sharing evaluations with higher-order administrators are particularly high. In Istanbul (Türkiye), over 70% of students from both age groups had teachers who report submitting reports and observations of students' social and emotional skills to higher-level administrators. In contrast, this concerns less than 10% of students Daegu (Korea), Helsinki (Finland) and Ottawa (Canada) at age 10, and in Daegu (Korea), Helsinki (Finland) and Sintra (Portugal) at age 15.

How do schools promote and nurture students' social and emotional learning?

Whether the aim of enhancing social and emotional skills is reached largely depends on an active promotion of these skills in schools; research suggests that there are different approaches to doing so effectively. Promising approaches are the implementation of specific programmes or activities targeting these skills or the provision of extracurricular activities (OECD, 2015[1]; Sánchez Puerta, Valerio and Gutiérrez Bernal, 2016[2]; Cefai et al., 2018[10]). Naturally, these approaches vary in effectiveness as well as availability and quality of evidence on their impact.

Data from the SSES indicate that, on average across cities, approaches that embed the promotion of social and emotional skills into existing school practices are more prevalent (Figure 3). For over or close to 80% of students in both age groups, teachers indicated that students' social and emotional skills are promoted by means of their general school practices, school's disciplinary rules or teachers being requested to promote these skills as part of their work (Table A3). Equally widespread – according to teachers' reports – is promotion by providing feedback and advice to parents about their children's social and emotional skills and the inclusion of the development of such skills as one of the objectives in the school educational plan. In most cities at least 70% of students from both age groups were in schools that used these approaches to enhance social and emotional learning.

> In most schools, social and emotional promotion is embedded into existing practices. This bears the risk of treating it as a mere by-product of academic learning, and abridging or skipping social and emotional activities due to tight schedules and seemingly competing priorities.

The findings suggest good baseline conditions for social and emotional education in schools. Parental involvement and clear objectives are essential ingredients for effective promotion of social and emotional skills (Sánchez Puerta, Valerio and Gutiérrez Bernal, 2016[2]; OECD, 2015[1]; Jones et al., 2018[11]). Furthermore, teachers are key agents of an impactful and sustainable social and emotional education (Cefai et al., 2018[10]; Jones et al., 2018[11]). It is therefore important to point to the significant differences between 10- and 15-year-old students observed concerning the involvement of teachers and parents in the promotion of social and emotional learning. On average across cities, fewer 15-year-old students than 10-year-olds had teachers who were requested to promote social and emotional skills as part of their work (6 percentage-point difference, based on teachers' reports). Equally important, providing feedback and advice to parents is significantly less used for skill promotion for this age group (7 percentage-point difference).

Compared to such embedded approaches, more direct approaches that have a clear focus on social and emotional learning are less common across cities, and variations between cities are larger. Among the direct approaches, organising extracurricular activities is most common. Across cities and age groups, over 70% of students had teachers who indicated that this is chosen as an approach to promoting social and emotional learning. The variation between cities is sizeable, ranging from 56% in Daegu (Korea) to 95% in Suzhou (China) for 10-year-olds, and from 45% in Helsinki (Finland) to 90% in Suzhou (China) for 15-year-olds.

Figure 3. Promotion of students' social and emotional skills in schools

Percentage of students whose teachers reported that the development of students' social and emotional skills has been promoted in their school by the following approaches (international average)
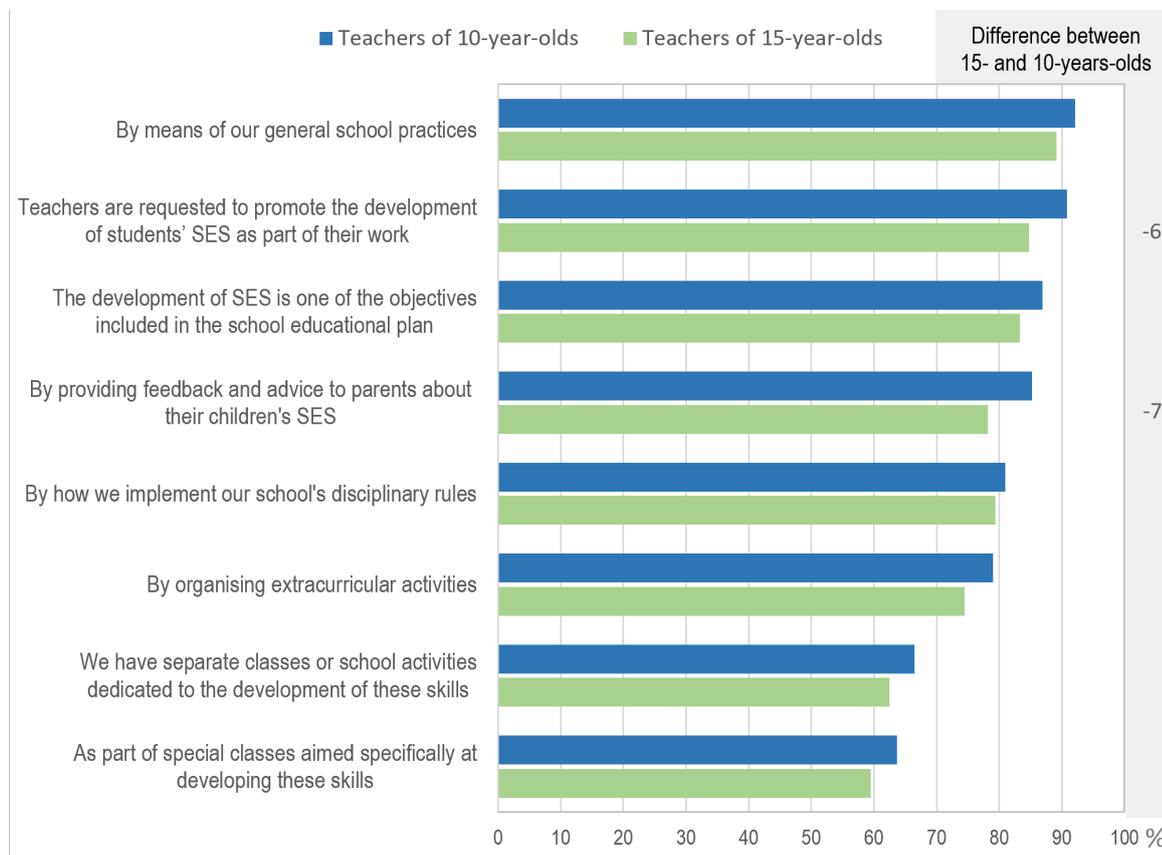
Note: Data for Ottawa (Canada) and Sintra (Portugal) did not reach response rate standards and are not included in international averages. Differences between the 10- and 15-year-old cohorts that are not significant are not shown.
Source: *OECD, SSES 2019 Database, Table A3.*

Extracurricular activities offer ample opportunities for children to develop social and emotional skills (OECD, 2015[1]; OECD, 2021[8]). Previous findings from the SSES, for example, suggest that participation in sports and arts activities *outside of school* is related to creativity and curiosity in both age groups (OECD, 2021[3]). However, participation in such out-of-school activities is lower among 15-year-olds than among 10-year-olds, which was highlighted as a potential explanation for observed age gaps in these skills. Providing more extracurricular activities *at school* may be an important lever for counterbalancing lower out-of-school participation of 15-year-old students in these activities and, thus, for reducing age gaps in skills. Results from PISA 2018 suggest that offering creative extracurricular activities has important implications for students' attainment in reading (OECD, 2020[7]). However, findings from the SSES teacher data on the provision of *extracurricular activities at schools* do not yield a significant difference between age groups, indicating equal opportunities for 10- and 15-year-olds to participate in such activities at schools.

Comparably few students attended schools where separate classes or activities dedicated to the development of these skills exist, or that offer special classes aimed specifically at developing these skills (less than two-thirds for both age groups, according to teachers' reports). Naturally, opportunities for social and emotional learning can be provided while teaching subjects such as mathematics, reading or arts (Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019[12]; Jones et al., 2018[11]). Yet there is a risk that activities could be abridged

or skipped due to tight schedules and seemingly competing priorities, such as academic content (Jones et al., 2018[11]). Schools need to ensure that enough time and attention is devoted to social and emotional skills to evoke the desired impact (Sánchez Puerta, Valerio and Gutiérrez Bernal, 2016[2]).

Differences between cities in the prevalence of these more direct approaches are quite substantial, especially for 15-year-olds. They range from 30% in Sintra (Portugal) to 83% in Suzhou (China) for the provision of separate classes or school activities, and from 31% in Sintra (Portugal) to 93% in Bogotá (Colombia) for the use of special classes. For 10-year-olds, at least half of all students were enrolled in a school which uses such direct approaches to promote social and emotional learning (according to teachers' reports). The highest shares of over or close to 70% were observed in Daegu (Korea), Helsinki (Finland) and Suzhou (China) for the provision of separate classes or activities, as well as in Helsinki (Finland) and Suzhou (China) for special classes dedicated specifically to the development of these skills.

As outlined, research connects these approaches to promoting social and emotional learning with students' skill levels. Yet, the SSES data do not allow studying these links (see Box 1).

Box 1: Limitations of the SSES and research implications

The SSES is the most comprehensive international effort to date to collect evidence on social and emotional skills of school-aged students, as well as the family, school and community contexts in which they acquire these skills. However, there are important limitations to the data that should be addressed by future research. First, the cross-sectional nature of the survey does not allow for studying causality. Second, SSES data are challenged by bias that are common in survey data: for example, socially desirable responding and a selection bias that makes participation of cities more likely when there is interest in the study topic. Third, the SSES principals and teachers do not constitute representative samples. Rather, they are the principals and teachers of representative samples of students. Results need to be interpreted as characteristics of students, which makes reporting cumbersome. To improve readability, the Spotlight does not strictly adhere to a student-centric reporting.

Lastly, the SSES design limits the possibility of studying classroom-level relationships. The survey is unique among the OECD surveys in the sense that teacher data can directly be linked to student data on a classroom level. Yet teacher sample size (OECD, 2021[13]) as well as average cluster sizes (i.e. average number of students per teacher) vary substantially across cities, and are quite low in some cases (ranging from 3 to 8 for 10-year-olds and 2 to 8 for 15-year-olds). Moreover, the information for linking teacher to student data is incomplete. For each sampled student, the SSES selected a teacher to participate in the survey. The sampled students were, however, also taught by other participating and non-participating teachers, but this information is missing.

The international report used two-level models to decompose the variance in students' social and emotional skill into student- and school-level variance (OECD, 2021[3]). The analysis revealed that students' social and emotional skills vary mainly within schools, while variations between schools were rather small. This Spotlight breaks the variance down further by using three-level models: on average across cities, the share of variance in students' social and emotional skills is distributed quite evenly between the classroom level (2% to 4% for 10-year-olds and 1% to 5% for 15-year-olds for the different skills) and school level (2% to 4% for 10-year-olds and 1% to 4% for 15-year-olds). In most cases, neither classrooms nor schools differed significantly in students' social and emotional skills. Given the design limitations, these estimations should, however, be interpreted with caution.

Overall, more longitudinal and experimental studies are needed that study further factors of the school environment relevant to students' social and emotional learning. These should be studied in greater detail with study designs that allow for a better exploration of classroom-level factors.
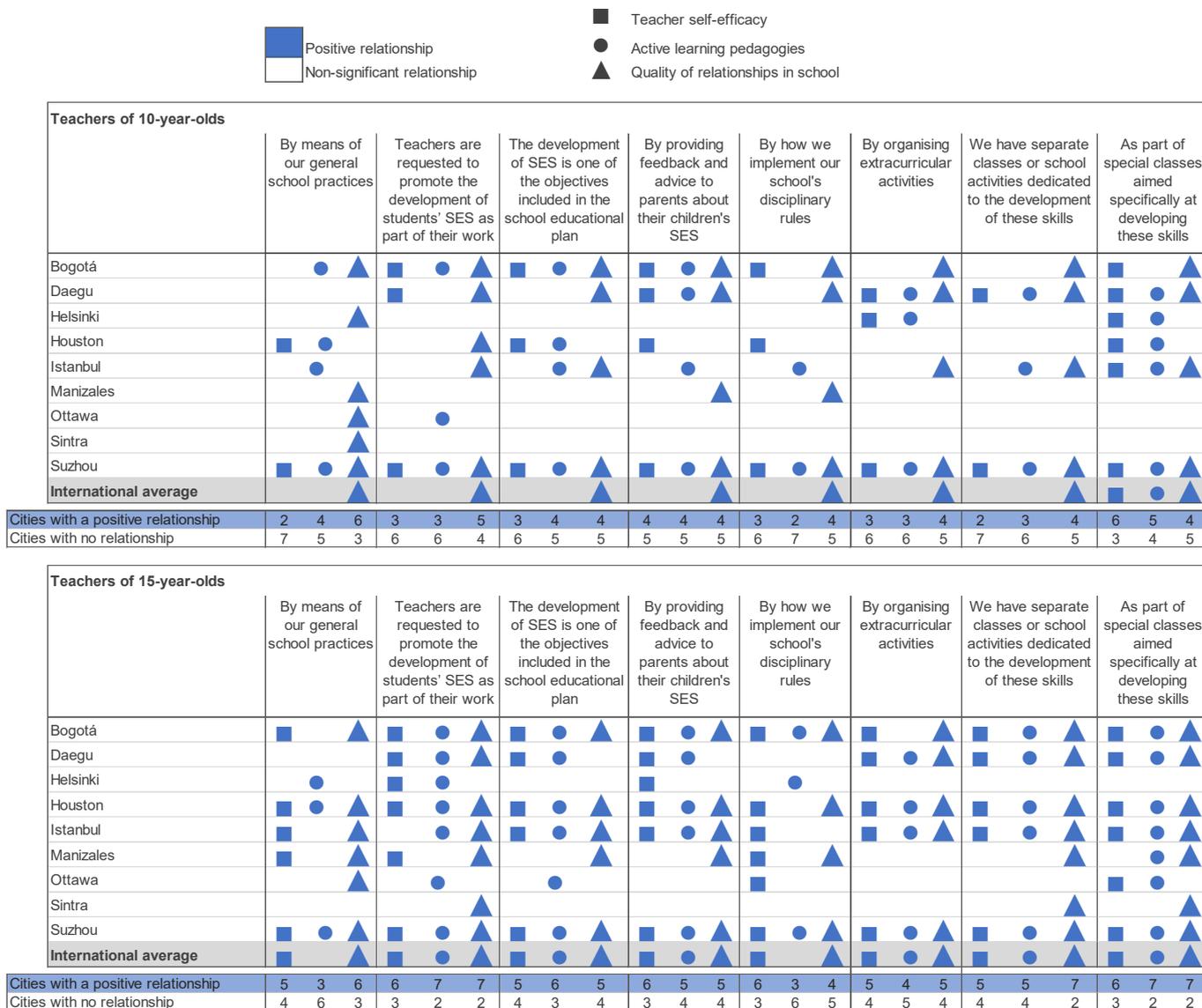
Alternatively, this Spotlight examines associations between these approaches and indicators of school environments that nurture social and emotional learning, and that are based on teachers' reports – for example, the overall quality of relationships. By focusing on the *teacher-perceived overall quality of relationships* at the school, the Spotlight complements previous findings from the international report on *students' perceptions of their personal relationships* to their teachers (OECD, 2021[3]). The international report found that students' personal relationships to teachers relate positively to students' social and emotional skills in both age groups. As teachers are key agents of social and emotional education in schools and responsible for creating nurturing school environments, the Spotlight also looks at two teacher characteristics relevant to students' social and emotional learning: teachers' reported use of active learning pedagogies and their self-efficacy (Sánchez Puerta, Valerio and Gutiérrez Bernal, 2016[2]; Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019[12]; OECD, 2021[8]).

Results from SSES teacher data reveal significantly positive relationships between the different approaches to promoting social and emotional learning and all studied indicators of a nurturing school environment for 15-year-old students, on average across cities (Figure 4, Tables A4-A6). Teachers reporting that social and emotional learning is promoted at school also reported higher self-efficacy, use of more active learning pedagogies and better relationships at school. There are only two exceptions: teachers' use of active learning pedagogies is unrelated to the promotion of social and emotional skills through general school practices and/or schools' disciplinary rules. For 10-year-olds, significant positive average relationships emerged of all approaches to quality relationships across cities, though relationships were not significant for most of them. Additionally, the promotion of social and emotional skills as part of special classes relates to teachers' self-efficacy and the use of active learning pedagogies.

For both age groups, average relationships were strongest for the promotion by means of general school practices, by requesting teachers to promote social and emotional skills as part of their work, and by providing feedback and advice to parents about their child's social and emotional skills. The relationships were among the strongest for Suzhou (China) for both age groups. Relative strong and consistent relationships were also found for Bogotá (Colombia), Houston (United States) and Istanbul (Türkiye) for 15-year-olds, as well as for Bogotá (Colombia) and Daegu (Korea) for 10-year-olds.

Figure 4. Relationships between social and emotional promotion in schools and indicators of a school environment that nurtures social and emotional learning

Based on teachers' reports, by student age group

Legend:
- ■ Positive relationship
- □ Non-significant relationship
- ■ Teacher self-efficacy
- ● Active learning pedagogies
- ▲ Quality of relationships in school

Teachers of 10-year-olds

	By means of our general school practices	Teachers are requested to promote the development of students' SES as part of their work	The development of SES is one of the objectives included in the school educational plan	By providing feedback and advice to parents about their children's SES	By how we implement our school's disciplinary rules	By organising extracurricular activities	We have separate classes or school activities dedicated to the development of these skills	As part of special classes aimed specifically at developing these skills
Bogotá								
Daegu								
Helsinki								
Houston								
Istanbul								
Manizales								
Ottawa								
Sintra								
Suzhou								
International average								
Cities with a positive relationship	2 4 6	3 3 5	3 4 4	4 4 4	3 2 4	3 3 4	2 3 4	6 5 4
Cities with no relationship	7 5 3	6 6 4	6 5 5	5 5 5	6 7 5	6 6 5	7 6 5	3 4 5

Teachers of 15-year-olds

	By means of our general school practices	Teachers are requested to promote the development of students' SES as part of their work	The development of SES is one of the objectives included in the school educational plan	By providing feedback and advice to parents about their children's SES	By how we implement our school's disciplinary rules	By organising extracurricular activities	We have separate classes or school activities dedicated to the development of these skills	As part of special classes aimed specifically at developing these skills
Bogotá								
Daegu								
Helsinki								
Houston								
Istanbul								
Manizales								
Ottawa								
Sintra								
Suzhou								
International average								
Cities with a positive relationship	5 3 6	6 7 7	5 6 5	6 5 5	6 3 4	5 4 5	5 5 7	6 7 7
Cities with no relationship	4 6 3	3 2 2	4 3 4	3 4 4	3 6 5	4 5 4	4 4 2	3 2 2

Note: Data for Ottawa (Canada) and Sintra (Portugal) did not reach response rate standards and are not included in international averages.
Results of linear regression after controlling for teachers' gender and years of experience as a teacher.
Source: OECD, SSES 2019 Database, Tables A4-6.

Are teachers prepared for the task, and does it matter?

The results outlined above suggest that most schools rely on teachers to be the engines of social and emotional education in school. Devoting thoughtful, sustained, and systematic attention to children's social and emotional learning requires of teachers a sophisticated set of skills and knowledge (Jones et al., 2018[11]; Cefai et al., 2018[10]). To develop these, teachers need to be provided with sufficient training on relevant topics. Consequently, many programmes proven to be effective in fostering social and emotional learning in schools include a teacher training component (Oliveira et al., 2021[14]; OECD, 2015[1]; Sánchez Puerta, Valerio and Gutiérrez Bernal, 2016[2]).

The SSES asked teachers if they had the opportunity ("very much"; "a lot"; "somewhat", "a little"; or "no") to deal with different topics relating to the promotion of social and emotional skills during their in- and pre-service training and professional development. On average across cities, around 30% of 10-year-old students had teachers who very much had the opportunity to deal with topics relating to child development, student-teacher interaction and methods of teaching that involve group activities (Figure 5 and Table A7, based on teachers' reports). Another 32% to 36% of 10-year-olds had teachers who had these opportunities a lot, whereas around 10% had teachers who had no or only very few opportunities. Developing social and emotional skills in children, however, was less well-covered: only 25% of 10-year-olds had teachers who very much had the opportunity to learn about this topic. Equally important, the share of students with teachers who had no or few learning opportunities in this area is also highest among all topics (17%).

Figure 5. Teachers' opportunities to learn about topics related to the promotion of social and emotional skills

Percentage of students whose teachers reported different levels of opportunity for dealing with the following topics during their in- and pre-service training and professional development (international average)
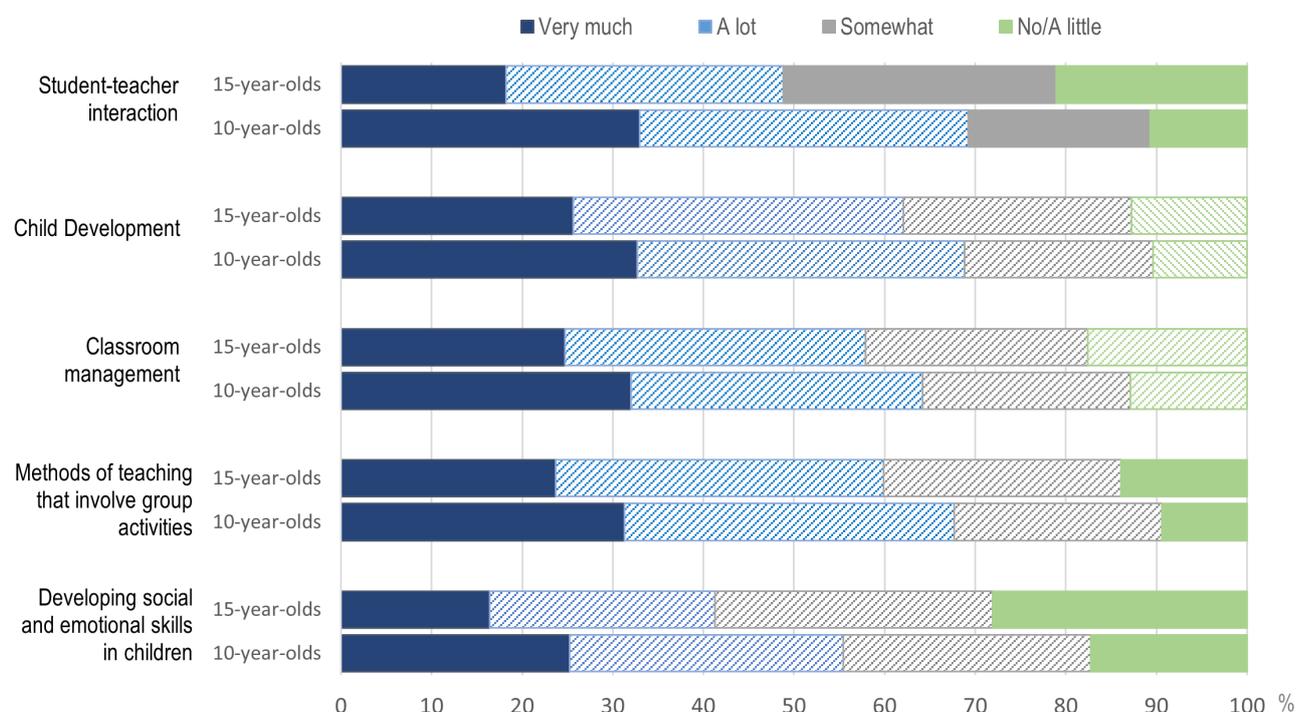
Note: Data for Ottawa (Canada) and Sintra (Portugal) did not reach response rate standards and are not included in international averages. Differences between 10- and 15-year-old students that are not significant are textured diagonally.
Source: OECD, SSES 2019 Database, Table A7.

Results differed significantly between teachers of 10- and 15-year-olds, indicating that teachers in higher grades are less prepared to promote social and emotional skills compared to teachers in lower grades. On average across participating cities, fewer 15-year-old students than 10-year-old students had teachers having had very much the opportunity to learn about all topics on social and emotional education (percentage-point differences of at least 7%). Particularly wide gaps exist for child development (15 percentage points) and developing social and emotional skills in children (9 percentage points). At the same time, the share of 15-year-olds with teachers without or with few learning opportunities was

significantly higher for methods that involve group activities (a difference of 5 percentage points), student-teacher interaction (10 percentage points) and developing social and emotional skills (11 percentage points).

Learning gaps between teachers of 10-year-olds and 15-year-olds vary across cities and are particularly large in the participating Asian cities. In Daegu (Korea), the percentage-point difference in terms of teachers with significant learning opportunities between both age groups ranges from 22 to 31 percentage points across the different topics, and in Suzhou from 8 to 21 percentage points. Similarly, these two cities also display consistent differences in the share of students with teachers who had little or no training though differing considerably in size across topics (from 3 to 13 percentage points in Daegu (Korea) and from 3 to 25 percentage points in Suzhou (China)). Notably, Ottawa (Canada) demonstrates partly reversed patterns: significantly more 15-year-olds had teachers who very much had the opportunity to learn about child development (a difference of 9 percentage points) and significantly fewer of them had teachers with no or little opportunity to learn about methods of teaching that involve group activities (10 percentage points).

Specific training helps boost teachers' preparedness for turning schools into environments that nurture social and emotional learning.

Teacher training is a vital element of effective social and emotional education as it boosts teacher professionalism for promoting social and emotional learning and creating a nurturing climate in schools (Oliveira et al., 2021[14]). Results from TALIS 2018, for instance, suggest that learning in initial teacher training about teaching cross-curricular skills – which includes social and emotional topics such as creativity – relates positively to teacher self-efficacy (OECD, 2019[15]). A recent study in early elementary schools has also demonstrated that interventions that include instructions on how to reinforce students' social skills can boost teachers' efficacy in addition to students' social skills (Smolkowski et al., 2022[16]).

Regression analysis of the SSES teacher data supports the idea that specific training helps boost teachers' preparedness for turning schools into environments that nurture social and emotional learning (Figure 6 and Tables A8-10). On average across cities, the more teachers have had significant opportunities to learn about social and emotional topics, the more confident they are in their teaching, the more frequently they use active learning pedagogies, and the better the quality of relationships are at school. These positive associations exist for both student age groups. Relationships were particularly strong when teachers had had significant opportunities to learn about developing social and emotional skills.

Similar patterns across cities and age groups emerged for all five socio-emotional learning topics studied. Seven cities show positive relationships between the different learning opportunities and teachers' self-efficacy, as displayed in the bottom part of Figure 6. Six cities show the same for active learning pedagogies as well as for the quality of relationships at school. There is only one exception: opportunities to learn about student-teacher interactions is only related to quality relationships in five cities for teachers of 15-year-old students, and one negative relationship was observed for Helsinki (Finland). The relationships are particularly strong in Suzhou (China) for both age groups across all topics and indicators. Consistent, albeit slightly lower, relationships across all topics and indicators were also found for Bogotá (Colombia) and Istanbul (Türkiye), while the only city where none of the association is significant for both age groups is Manizales (Colombia).

Figure 6. Relationships between teachers' opportunities to learn and indicators of a school environment that nurtures social and emotional learning

Based on teachers' reports, by student age cohort

Legend:
- Positive relationship (blue)
- Negative relationship (green)
- Non-significant relationship (white)
- Teacher self-efficacy (square)
- Active learning pedagogies (circle)
- Quality of relationships in school (triangle)

Teachers of 10-year-olds

	Child development			Student-teacher interaction			Methods of teaching that involve group activities			Classroom management			Developing social and emotional skills in children		
Cities with a positive relationship	7	6	6	8	4	6	7	5	8	8	7	7	9	9	6
Cities with no relationships	2	3	3	1	5	3	2	4	1	1	2	2	0	0	3
Cities with a neagtive relationship	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Rows (cities): Bogotá, Daegu, Helsinki, Houston, Istanbul, Manizales, Ottawa, Sintra, Suzhou, International average

Teachers of 15-year-olds

	Child development			Student-teacher interaction			Methods of teaching that involve group activities			Classroom management			Developing social and emotional skills in children		
Cities with a positive relationship	7	9	4	8	9	6	9	8	5	9	8	7	8	8	6
Cities with no relationships	2	0	5	1	0	2	0	1	4	0	1	2	1	1	3
Cities with a neagtive relationship	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Rows (cities): Bogotá, Daegu, Helsinki, Houston, Istanbul, Manizales, Ottawa, Sintra, Suzhou, International average

Note: Data for Ottawa (Canada) and Sintra (Portugal) did not reach response rate standards and are not included in international averages. Results of linear regression for having the opportunity very much to learn about the topic after controlling for teachers' gender and years of experience as a teacher. Reference category is having few or no opportunities.
Source: OECD, SSES 2019 Database, Tables A8-10.

Breaking down these overall results suggests a dosage effect, i.e. the extent to which learning opportunities relating to social and emotional education have been covered matters for observed relationships. Students from both age groups whose teachers have very much had the opportunity to learn about these topics had teachers with a higher self-efficacy compared to students with teachers having had no or few opportunities (Figure 7). No significant advantage was found for teachers of both age groups who had some or a lot of opportunity to learn about these topics, except for opportunities to learn about the development of social and emotional skills. Teachers of 15-year-olds having had a lot of learning opportunities have a significantly

higher self-efficacy compared to teachers with no or few opportunities. The advantage is, however, lower than for teachers who reported having very much had such learning opportunities.

Figure 7. Detailed results for the relationships between opportunities to learn and indicators of a school environment that nurtures social and emotional learning (international average)

Based on teachers' reports, by student age group
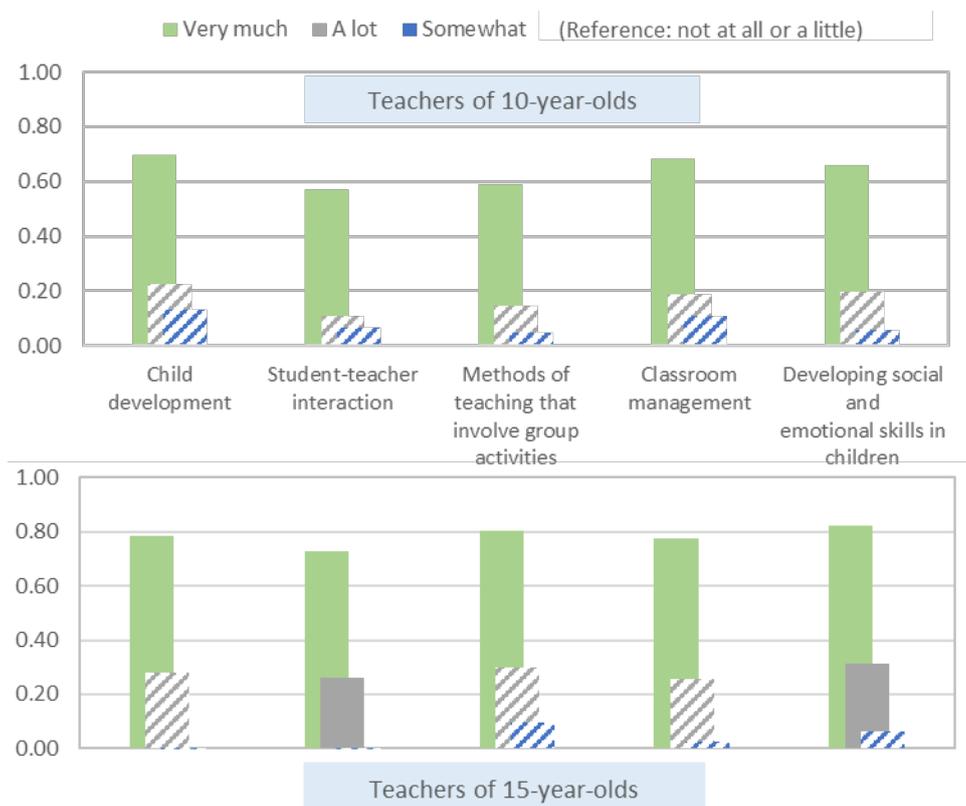
Note: Data for Ottawa (Canada) and Sintra (Portugal) did not reach response rate standards and are not included in international averages. Results of linear regression after controlling for teachers' gender and years of experience as a teacher. Reference category is having few or no opportunities. Significant relationships are coloured, non-significant relationships are textured diagonally.
Source: OECD, SSES 2019 Database, Table 11.

Similar results are observed when breaking down the relationships of teachers' opportunities to learn to their use of active learning pedagogies and the quality of relationships at school (Tables A8-A10). Teachers who had substantial training opportunities also tend to report better relationships with their students and a more frequent use of active learning pedagogies. No advantage was found for teachers of both age groups who had some or a lot of opportunity to learn about these topics in most cases, and advantages are substantially lower in the remaining ones. These findings echo those from TALIS 2018, which suggested that some teachers feel that the initial training they received was not sufficient in preparing them for some aspects of their job, and that professional development needs to be impactful to boost teacher self-efficacy (OECD, 2019[15]). A recent meta-analysis of social and emotional interventions with training sessions for teachers did not find evidence for a dosage effect when comparing trainings of 1–14 hours to 15–29 hours, and 30 hours or more (Oliveira et al., 2021[14]).

The bottom line: What does it take to turn schools into hubs of social and emotional learning?

Turning schools into hubs of social and emotional learning requires a holistic approach where skills are promoted on many fronts (OECD, 2021[3]; Sánchez Puerta, Valerio and Gutiérrez Bernal, 2016[2]; OECD, 2015[1]). The findings of this Spotlight underline the importance of the following:

- **Making social and emotional skills an integral component of evaluations and assessments:** Though equally acknowledged as important aims, social and emotional skills are less evaluated in schools than academic skills, especially for older students. Social and emotional skills should form an integral component of schools' evaluation frameworks in addition to academic skills (OECD, 2013[6]; Cefai et al., 2018[10]). Its successful implementation requires sufficient support for teachers (e.g. specific training and easy-to-use tools for the assessment of social and emotional skills) and well-designed procedures that ensure a broad and efficient use of collected data.

- **Ensuring that evaluations and assessments are used beyond classroom walls:** Assessments of student skills serve many important purposes, from improving the learning support for all students and strengthening parental involvement to guiding education policies and practices (OECD, 2013[6]; OECD, 2020[7]). For this, evaluation frameworks and practices need to ensure that results are shared with key stakeholders across the education system such as parents and decision makers (e.g. principals, higher-order administrators). Data from the SSES, however, indicate that there is room for increasing the use of social and emotional skill assessments beyond classroom walls.

- **Devoting sufficient time and attention to socio-emotional skill development in schools:** Results suggest that schools mainly embed social and emotional education into existing school practices. Social and emotional skills can be promoted while delivering academic content (Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019[12]; Jones et al., 2018[11]). Yet there is a risk that these skills are treated as mere by-products of academic learning. Social and emotional activities are at risk of being abridged or skipped due to tight schedules and seemingly competing priorities such as academic content. Schools need to ensure that sufficient time and attention is devoted to socio-emotional skill development. Providing more extracurricular activities *at school* may be an important lever for counterbalancing lower out-of-school participation of 15-year-olds in such activities and, thus, for reducing age gaps in skills.

- **Adopting a whole-school approach that includes parents as partners of skill promotion:** According to SSES teacher data, work with parents plays an inferior role in social and emotional promotion in lower secondary education. Yet parents remain crucial partners beyond primary education. Schools and teachers need to team up with parents, discuss their child's social and emotional growth, and plan how skills can be further promoted within and outside of schools. A whole-school approach that builds on partnerships with parents, the community and other stakeholders is key for a successful social and emotional education (Cefai et al., 2018[10]; Sánchez Puerta, Valerio and Gutiérrez Bernal, 2016[2]; Jones et al., 2018[11]).

- **Providing adequate support and training for teachers:** Teachers need sufficient support in initial teacher education and continuous professional learning (e.g. coaching and mentoring), especially if schools rely mainly on teachers to do this work (Jones et al., 2018[11]; Cefai et al., 2018[10]; Oliveira et al., 2021[14]). Promoting social and emotional skills outside of predefined programmes and prescribed activities means that teachers need to plan and design opportunities for social and emotional learning and pick up teachable moments that they observe in their daily work. This requires a sophisticated set of knowledge and skills that cannot be acquired in one-shot workshops.

The Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES)

This document was prepared by the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) team of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) at the OECD. The OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills is an international survey that identifies and assesses the conditions and practices that foster or hinder 10- and 15-year-old students' development of social and emotional skills.

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See: OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills

OECD (2021), *Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en.

All figures and tables are available online under the following link:
https://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/social-emotional-skills-study/OECD-EDU-spotlight-schools-as-hubs-for-social-and-emotional-learning-annex.xlsx

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