

**Subject:** A Review: Closing Academic Gaps, Decreasing Discipline Problems, Improving SEL Practices  
**From:** "Dr. Howie Knoff" <knoffprojectachieve1@gmail.com>  
**Date:** 1/2/23, 4:45 PM  
**To:** jablanton@clevelandcountyschools.org

## ***Project ACHIEVE Educational Services***

**Keynotes & PD Presentations \* On-Site Consultation \* Publications \*  
Due Process/Expert Witness Testimony \* Grant Writing Support**

### **This Week's Blog:**

## **Reviewing the Educational Challenges of 2022**

---

## **How to Address Academic Gaps, Discipline and SEL Problems, School Shootings, and Continued Disproportionality**

**January 2, 2023**

Photo Courtesy of Engin Akyurt

***Dear Jennifer,***

[[CLICK HERE](#) to read this Blog on  
the Project ACHIEVE Webpage]

**Project ACHIEVE's  
Best-Selling**

## **Introduction**

Happy New Year!

On a personal level, it's been challenging, but exciting, month. In the midst of moving from Arkansas to Florida, I was consulting all over the country (as well as Canada) while living out of a string of hotels for over 3 months. My wife and I (mostly my wife) spent most of December unpacking hundreds of boxes. . . while trying figure out how to lock our front door!

If you missed an early December Blog from me. . . there wasn't one... sorry!

Sometimes your personal life needs to take a "front seat" to your professional life. . . in fact, that probably should be the case virtually all of the time.

-----

Meanwhile. . . on a professional level. . . it's been a challenging and eventful 12 months.

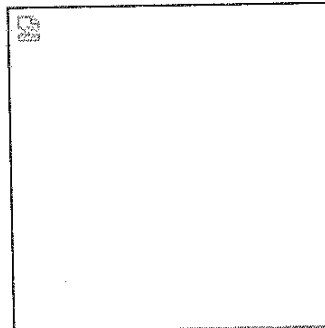
While many schools have a "pandemic hangover" that continues to impact students' academic progress and social-emotional status, educators also continue to struggle with long-standing issues like school violence and chronic absenteeism, cultural responsiveness and disproportionality, early intervention and special education services, and staff recruitment, coverage, and retention.

-----

While I don't have a corner on the market of creative ideas and solutions, I do think that some of the "solutions" that have been marketed for a long period of time in the diverse fields of education and psychology simply have not worked and need to be retired.

As discussed in one of my Blogs

## **On-Line/On-Demand Courses**



### **Teaching Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Skills to Improve Student Engagement, Self-Control, and Achievement**

This comprehensive course gives you everything that you need--at the school, staff, and (preschool through high school) student levels--to plan and implement an effective, evidence-based, multi-tiered SEL/Positive Behavioral Support system that produces real student outcomes relative to their social, emotional, and behavioral interactions.

**\$799.00**

**[CLICK HERE for More Information or to Purchase](#)**

this year, "school improvement begins with principles before (figuratively) principals." After that, strategic planning and implementation, an effective multi-tiered service and support system, and professional development and coaching—that holds all of us accountable to student-centered outcomes—becomes essential.

---

### **A Year of Solutions in Review**

At the end of every year, I take a list of my bi-monthly Blog titles and organize them into "thematic clusters."

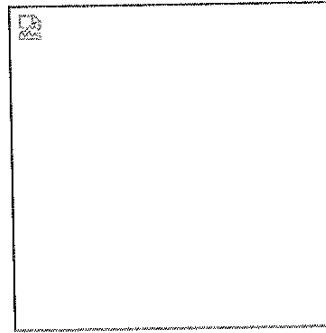
Because I write virtually all of my Blogs based either on (a) what has occurred in education (e.g., during my school consultations, or across the country) during the previous few weeks, or (b) significant just-published articles, reports, or (social) media posts, the clusters often represent the most important school and schooling themes we have experienced during the past year.

Below, I briefly review these themes and Blogs, and— after providing an Abstract for each Blog— give you the links to the twenty-two messages written during 2022.

I hope you will (re-)read the Blogs that are most important to your work in your respective field. Moreover, I hope you will implement one or more of my suggestions during the next semester of this school year.

---

**Blog Continues Below. . .**

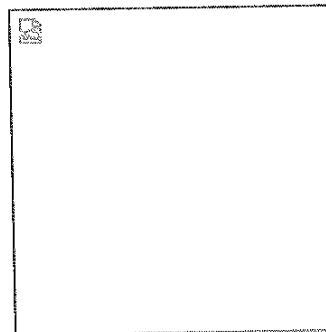


### **Implementing Effective Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports: Academic and Social-Emotional Prevention, Assessment, and Intervention**

This seven-session (with two Bonus Sessions) professional development video-course provides everything that districts and schools need to create and implement their own successful multi-tiered systems. We discuss a district-wide implementation process, data-based problem-solving approaches to identify the root causes of students' challenges, and academic and social, emotional, and behavioral (Tier 2 and 3) interventions.

**\$799.00**

**[CLICK HERE for More Information or to Purchase](#)**



### **Coping with Stress in a Stressful World:**

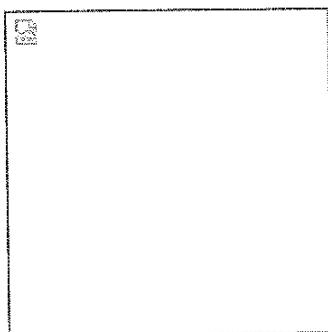
## **Teaching Students How to Manage Their Emotions, Thoughts, and Behavior**

This four-session course differentiates between anxiety, stress, and trauma, and discusses how students' emotional "triggers" result in fight, flight, or freeze responses. We talk about ways to teach students emotional self-regulation in the classroom so that they learn how to prevent and prepare for stressful situations. And, we address how to analyze why some students still have difficulties, and what cognitive-behavioral interventions our mental health professionals may need to consider. All of this is adapted for both general and special education classrooms.

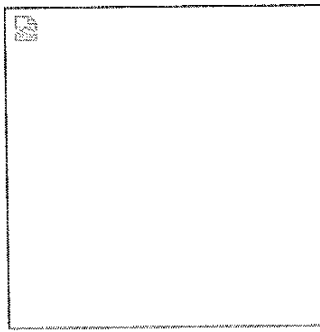
\$599.00

**[CLICK HERE for More Information or to Purchase](#)**

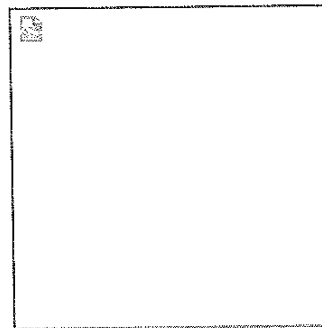
## **Please Consider Our Evidence-Based Stop & Think Social Skills Classroom Resources**



**The Stop & Think Social Skills Full Classroom Kit for Schools (preK - Gr 1)**



**The Stop & Think Social Skills Full Classroom Kit for Schools (Gr 2 - Gr 3)**



**The Stop & Think Social Skills Full Classroom Kit for Schools (Gr 4 - Gr 5)**

**[CLICK HERE for More Information](#)**

**Blog Continues Here. . .**

**Cluster 1: School Improvement: Collaboration, Principles, Professional Development, Politics, and Performance**

With all of the talk about closing students' achievement gaps, addressing students' social-emotional needs, and resetting schools' trajectories toward excellence, educators still must recognize that this will occur only through strategic planning and implementation. At its core, this planning should focus on the science-to-practice of effective teams, professional development, collaboration, coaching, and feedback.

Five Blogs this past year focused on how districts and schools can excel in these critical continuous school improvement areas.

[LINK to each Blog by clicking on either its publication date or its [CLICK HERE](#) insert.]

**November 26, 2022 [How to Create High-Performing, Collaborative Teams of Staff in Schools: No Woman/Man is an Island](#)**

Abstract. Blog focuses on the importance and characteristics of high-performing, collaborative school teams and staff—emphasizing that many school leaders receive little training and coaching in this area. It shares four tenets to help educators “get off their islands” and on to collaborative teams. It then applies Friedman’s research, identifying five characteristics of high-performing teams, to school and other educational settings.

[[CLICK HERE](#) to [LINK](#) to [BLOG](#)]

-----  
**October 1, 2022 [Reflecting on My 50<sup>th</sup> High School Reunion and What I’ve Learned about Life and Life in Education: A Poetic Sequel to “American Pie”](#)**

Abstract. Through an original poem based on the 1972 hit song “American Pie,” this Blog provides some personal and historical reflections on the occasion of the author’s 50<sup>th</sup> High School class reunion, and his experiences in American education.

[[CLICK HERE](#) to [LINK](#) to [BLOG](#)]

-----  
**June 25, 2022 [In Order to Improve. . . Schools Need to Understand How to Improve. School Improvement Begins with Principles before Principals: Paying It Forward](#)**

Abstract. This Blog discusses ten principles needed to guide school improvement and change—both internally from the Leaders within, and externally for those working as consultants from the outside. These principles can easily be adapted to virtually any work setting.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**May 14, 2022 Reconceptualizing Professional Development for the Coming School Year: Moving Away from Fly-by, "Spray and Pray," and Awareness-Only Training**

Abstract. Many school improvement initiatives fail because of their approach to professional development. This Blog describes the three interdependent goals and components of effective professional development, and the two science-based practices that must be embedded in the process. We end with a case study example of an effective elementary school professional development sequence focused on training teachers to teach the Stop & Think Social Skills in their classrooms.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**January 8, 2022 Educators Need to Deal with Reality by Facing, Analyzing, and then Changing Reality. The Damage Done When We Ignore, Lie About, Misinterpret, Sugar-Coat, or Surrealize Reality**

Abstract. With all of the polarized political, Pandemic, and pressurized issues and challenges facing education right now, this Blog encourages districts and schools to analyze, prioritize, strategize, and recognize that these issues will not go away or be solved by putting our collective "heads in the sand." We discuss the negative organizational impact of false and toxic positivity, and the importance of leaders having high and realistic expectations for change.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**Cluster 2: Social Skills Instruction and Social-Emotional Learning: Prevention, Assessment, Implementation, and Crisis Management**

Many districts and schools continue to choose and implement social-emotional learning activities based on generic, all-inclusive "definitions" or "conceptualizations" that have not been objectively or soundly researched and/or proven for in diverse educational settings.

Hence, they are at risk of wasting time, resources, and effort on strategies that will not overtly change students' social, emotional, or behavioral interactions. . . and—especially for students with challenging behaviors—the strategies may actually make the problem worse and/or more resistant to change.

Eight Blogs this past year focused in this broad area. Each one emphasized a science-to-practice perspective that included how to practically and functionally apply the recommendations to "real" schools, staff, students, and situations.

[LINK to each Blog by clicking on either its publication date or its CLICK HERE insert.]

**October 15, 2022 Emotionally Responding to a Crisis: Short-Term, Long-Term, Adults, and Children. Fight, Flight, Freeze, Resilience, and Resolve**

Abstract. Blog shares personal experiences and professional reflections prompted by Hurricane Ian's devastation in Fort Myers, Florida. Analysis focuses on student and adult

emotional reactions, the response phases to a natural disaster, and how to strengthen resilience.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**July 23, 2022 Should the U.S. Supreme Court Limit the Powers of the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)? How OSEP Has Taken "Liberties" with the Law, and Spent Tax-Payers' Money on Flawed Frameworks**

**Abstract.** Should the U.S. Supreme Court strike down specific regulations and legal interpretations made by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs? This Blog reviews (a) a recent Supreme Court decision limiting a federal agency's ability to interpret the law; (b) two recent announcements by OSEP regarding how schools should be disciplining students with disabilities, and that the vast majority of state departments of education are not in compliance with IDEA, 2004; and (c) seven critical multi-tiered system of supports flaws, advocated by OSEP, that result in ineffective services to students with disabilities. Blog encourages schools and districts to know the law, understand the limits of the law for federal agencies--like the U.S. Department of Education, and resist any pressure that occurs when ineffective practices--based on an agency's misinterpretation or over-reach of the law-- are recommended or "required."

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**April 30, 2022 Using Effective Practices to Screen and Validate Students' Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Status: Finding, Sorting, Analyzing, and Synthesizing the (Right) Data (Part II)**

**Abstract.** Blog discusses five primary ways to collect information within a school's screening-to-services process when students have SEL challenges.

This Blog (Part II of a two-part Series) discusses five primary ways to collect information within a school's screening-to-services process when students have SEL challenges: Reviewing, Interviewing, Observing, Testing, and gathering Self-Report information and data. Specific examples are provided, as well as screening-to-service/MTSS effective practices.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**April 16, 2022 YES: Teachers Should Help Screen Students for Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Challenges. NO: That's NOT Where the Screening Process Ends. Schools Must Use Effective Practices to Screen and then Validate Students' Mental Health Status (Part I)**

**Abstract.** In the face of schools training teachers to screen and recognize the "early warning" indicators of students' social-emotional and mental health problems, this Blog discusses the ten necessary screening-to-service practices that all schools should use, in a multiple-gating process, to ensure that valid student problems are identified, analyzed, and then addressed with high probability of success services, supports, strategies, and interventions.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**March 26, 2022 Students Understand Social "Reality" Only When They Can Socially Analyze Multiple Realities. Are Students Prepared When Personality and Power Control, Misrepresent, or Lie About the Truth?**

**Abstract.** Using a recent episode of Survivor where a transgender cast member "came out," this Blog discusses the importance to teaching students media and social media skills to

differentiate between fact, fiction, and fake news. Also addressed are the many controversial social issues students need to understand in the news and social media, the misguided attempts to politically and functionally shield students from these issues, and the fact that such censorship will result in students still accessing the prohibited information, but perhaps being misinformed during the process.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**March 5, 2022 Fitting Social Skills Instruction into the School Day: Necessity, Priority, Fidelity, and the Secondary School Advisory Period. Effective Planning, Execution, and Accountability are Essential to SEL Success**

**Abstract.** To address students' current social skills gaps, this Blog described the characteristics of effective social skills programs; when and how classroom teachers can schedule and teach the social skills consistently across the school year; why social skills instruction is important to students' academic progress--even with the current pandemic-generated gaps; and how to effectively use the secondary-level Advisory Period for social skills instruction.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**February 19, 2022 The SEL Secret to Success: You Need to "Stop & Think" and "Make Good Choices." Helping Students Learn and Demonstrate Emotional Control, Communication, and Coping**

**Abstract.** After describing Counselors' perspectives on the most pressing social, emotional, or behavioral student, staff, and school needs, this Blog describes the SEL outcomes when students are taught emotional control, communication, and coping skills in their classrooms, and then the "SEL Secret to Success"—the evidence-based Stop & Think Social Skills process and universal language. The science-to-practice underlying this language and why it works are detailed.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**February 5, 2022 Why Do They Keep Trying to "Validate" Restorative Practices with Lousy (or Worse) Data? More Proof that Schools Need to Avoid Restorative (Justice) Programs and Practices**

**Abstract.** This Blog critically analyzes (a) a new "research" report that inaccurately attempts to use a large-scale student survey to show that restorative practices "effectively" decrease disproportionate discipline actions for students of color, and (b) the implications of a recent ACLU report showing that the Pittsburgh (PA) School District under-reported disproportionate school arrests for students of color and disabilities in the face of a "successful" restorative practices program that ended the year before.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**Cluster 3: Addressing Students' (Integrated) Academic and Social-Emotional Needs and Gaps**

One of the continuing "pandemic hangover" challenges in schools across the country is the gap related to students' academic and social-emotional status and functioning.

Critically, this gap is uneven across where students live, their grade levels, socio-economic status, cultural and language backgrounds, and home and



family experiences. And yet, many schools seem to be using only one global, across-the-board strategy to address these integrated issues. . . often without the diagnostic, root cause data needed for differentiation and individualization.

Five Blogs this past year focused on effective practices in this area.

[LINK to each Blog by clicking on either its publication date or its [CLICK HERE](#) insert.]

November 12, 2022 **Teaching Students Needed Academic and Social-Emotional Skills: We Need to Sweat the Small Stuff**

Abstract. Blog describes five vignettes that reinforce the importance that educators and related services professionals “sweat the small stuff.” We demonstrate that, to make big and meaningful academic and social, emotional, and behavioral gains with students in our classrooms and schools, we need to sweat the small details that make effective practices work.

[[CLICK HERE](#) to [LINK](#) to [BLOG](#)]

-----

October 29, 2022 **The Three Keys to Closing Students’ Academic and Social-Emotional Gaps: Strategic Planning, Proven SEL Strategies, and Student-Centered Multi-Tiered Services and Supports**

Abstract. Blog discusses the predominant academic and social, emotional, and behavioral challenges for students in our schools today, and describes (with links to a recent national radio interview and past Blogs) the three keys to addressing these challenges and facilitating student success.

[[CLICK HERE](#) to [LINK](#) to [BLOG](#)]

-----

September 10, 2022 **The Academic and Social-Emotional Impact of Multiple Moves on Students in Poverty. The Stress We Feel When Moving is Exponentially Higher for Disadvantaged Students**

Abstract. This Blog discusses the research and real academic, social, emotional, and other impacts of the multiple moves often experienced by students who live in poverty. Educators are encouraged to “seek first to understand” the cumulative stresses of these moves when new students come from multiple schools with many different curricular, instruction, disciplinary, and social-interactive approaches.

[[CLICK HERE](#) to [LINK](#) to [BLOG](#)]

-----

August 27, 2022 **Generation C (COVID) is Entering School with Significant Language, Academic, and Social Delays. The Pressure on Our Preschool and Kindergarten Programs to Act NOW**

Abstract. This Blog reports the results of a number of recent studies and their descriptions of some of the delays exhibited by infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who have grown up during the pandemic. It then discusses some of the pandemic-related reasons why infants born during the pandemic appear to have nearly twice the risk of developmental delay—specifically in communication and social development—when compared with pre-pandemic infants.

It recommends evaluating individual children as needed, determining the pre-pandemic, pandemic-related, and pandemic-unrelated root causes of any problems found, and linking the evaluation results to specific services, supports, strategies, and interventions.

It concludes by detailing what early childhood, preschool, and kindergarten teachers,

administrators, and support staff need to do for today's Generation C children—supported in three areas by their schools and districts: Child Find, the use of Social-Developmental Histories, and the implementation of effective and compensatory educational services and supports.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**August 6, 2022 Closing the (Pandemic?) Reading Gap in Our Schools: We Need to Link Sound Assessment with Strategic Intervention. How One New Federal Status Report (and Three Popular Press Articles) May Lead Educators Astray**

**Abstract.** Blog critiques August 4, 2022 National Center for Education Statistics report identifying how many students ended the past school year with academic skill gaps. Also critiquing three follow-up popular press articles, Blog recommends a multi-tiered intervention continuum based on determining the root causes of each student's literacy gaps, and policy changes away from retaining students not proficient in reading at the end of Grade 3.

Blog critiques new National Center for Education Statistics report on students with literacy skill gaps and three popular press articles, recommending more effective ways to close the gaps.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**Cluster 4: School Safety, Student Discipline, and the Ongoing School Shooting Epidemic**

Echoing my introductory comments above, too often districts and schools choose (or continue) strategies to address school safety, classroom management, and student discipline and self-management that simply have not worked. . . across years and even decades.

Over these same years, I have provided science-to-practice explanations as to why these strategies have not worked and will not work, detailing alternative, evidence-based approaches that have demonstrated, sustained success across settings, time, and circumstances.

At the same time, some behavioral events—specifically, school shootings—transcend students and settings. . . as they also occur in community and socio-political contexts. Nonetheless, it is essential to understand the diverse ecological and psychological root causes of school shootings so that they can be minimized in the New Year.

Four Blogs this past year focused on this broad area.

[LINK to each Blog by clicking on either its publication date or its CLICK HERE insert.]

**July 9, 2022 Reviewing Three New Studies on Student Discipline, Disproportionate Office Referrals, and Racial Inequity. It's Not about School Shootings! It's about Recognizing What Needs to Change in our Classrooms**

**Abstract.** This Blog discusses three new studies on student safety and classroom discipline, disproportionate office referrals and school suspensions, and racial equity and students' need for social-emotional supports during the still-pandemic-influenced past school year. We end with an outline of action areas to make the systemic changes needed, and to help

schools build an infrastructure toward a successful future.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

June 11, 2022 **Why School Shootings should be Considered Extreme Events along the Social-Emotional Learning Continuum. . . And Why Schools Need to Conduct SEL Audits and Needs Assessments to Decrease the Future Risks**

Abstract. This Blog emphasizes that school shootings are extreme events at the far end of the social-emotional learning continuum that often occur due to a combination of incomplete preventative practices and ineffective responsive practices. Described are recommended SEL Audits and Needs Assessments to decrease the risks of future school shootings, as well as peer teasing, taunting, bullying, harassment, hazing, and physical aggression.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

May 26, 2022 **How Many More Children Need to be Gunned Down in our Schools and on our Streets? A Historical Plea to Protect our Children from the Politics of Polarization**

Abstract. Blog discusses the recent school shooting in Uvalde, TX, and why both gun control and mental health services are needed to decrease the possibility of similar, future-events. An emotional plea is made to separate history from politics, and to listen to Steve Kerr, who lost his Dad to gun violence, and Adalynn Ruiz, whose mother (a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher) was killed in Uvalde.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

January 22, 2022 **(Pandemic-Related?) Behavioral Challenges and Student Violence in Our Schools Today: Preparing for Action by Pursuing the Principles Needed for Assessment and Intervention**

Abstract. Given the increasing number of social, emotional, and behavioral challenges exhibited by students in schools across the country this school year, this Blog encouraged schools to avoid "crisis-oriented" reactions and responses.

Instead, we recommended using a strategic planning approach that is guided by both systemic and student-specific principles and practices.

[\[CLICK HERE to LINK to BLOG\]](#)

-----

**Summary**

While his quote varies depending on your source, H.L. Mencken, an American journalist and cultural critic, said:

For every complex problem there is a solution that is  
simple, elegant, clear, and wrong.

Far too often in education and psychology, we forget (or do not attend to) this quote.

Instead, we retreat toward simplistic solutions that (a) do not rely on sound and objective data-based root cause analyses; (b) are marketed by (perhaps, well-intentioned) individuals or (for-profit or not-for-profit) companies; or that

(c) may work in one setting or situation, but do not necessarily work in your setting and with your schools, staff or colleagues, or students.

I understand the dilemma of not enough time, resources, funds, expertise, or personnel.

But we cannot make decisions about students' educational lives and futures without regard to the elements of sound practice, implementation, and evaluation.

-----

As always, I appreciate everyone who reads this bi-monthly Blog and thinks about the issues or recommendations that we share.

I again wish all of you a "Happy New Year" on both a personal and professional level.

We have five to six more months to positively impact our students, staff and colleagues, schools, and other educational settings. While many districts are already planning for the future (i.e., the 2023 - 2024 school year), we still need to understand that the "future is now."

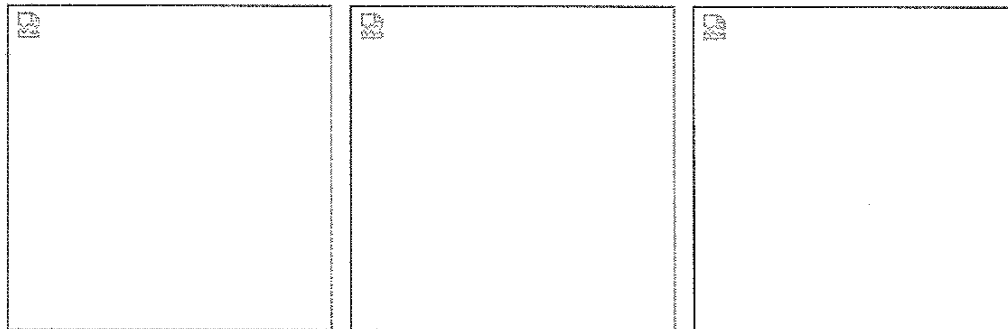
If I can help you map out your future—for example, in the areas of (a) school improvement, (b) social-emotional learning/positive behavioral discipline and classroom management systems, and (c) multi-tiered (special education) services and supports—feel free to contact me to begin this process.

Best,

**Howie**

[[CLICK HERE](#) to read this Blog on the Project ACHIEVE Webpage]

## MORE Evidence-Based Classroom Resources



**Strategic  
Planning and  
Continuous**

**Shared  
Leadership  
through School-**

**A Multi-Tiered  
Service and  
Support**

<b>School Improvement: Needs Assessments and SWOT/Resource Analyses</b>	<b>Level Committees: Process, Preparation, and First-Year Implementation Action Plans</b>	<b>Implementation Guidebook for Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap</b>
\$14.95	\$14.95	\$29.95

**CLICK HERE for More Information**

**ABOUT Dr. Howie Knoff**

A past-president of the National Association of School Psychologists, Howie is a national consultant, author, and presenter. He is the President of Project ACHIEVE Educational Solutions, and has been implementing its evidence-based (through SAMHSA) nationally-recognized school improvement program since 1990- working with thousands of school districts across the country.

He was a tenured Full Professor at two Research I institutions for over 20 years, and the Director of the Arkansas Department of Education's State Personnel Development Grant for 13 years-- facilitating the state-wide implementation of Project ACHIEVE's school improvement, PBIS/PBSS, and multi-tiered services approaches.

Howie earned his Ph.D. at Syracuse University, and he works on-site-- through professional development, consultation, and technical assistance-- to help schools and districts implement Project ACHIEVE strategies effectively, correctly, and successfully. He is a licensed Ph.D. Psychologist and a Nationally Certified School Psychologist.

**Dr. Howard M. Knoff**  
**President, PROJECT ACHIEVE Educational Solutions**

**Fort Myers, FL 33908**

Phone: **813-495-3318**

**Email: [howieknoff1@projectachieve.info](mailto:howieknoff1@projectachieve.info)**

**Website: [projectachieve.info](http://projectachieve.info)**

STAY CONNECTED

Facebook | Twitter | LinkedIn | YouTube

Project ACHIEVE Incorporated | 49 Woodberry Road, Little Rock, AR 72212

[Unsubscribe\\_jablanton@clevelandcountyschools.org](mailto:Unsubscribe_jablanton@clevelandcountyschools.org)

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by knoffprojectachieve1@gmail.com powered by

Trusted Email from Constant Contact - Try it FREE today.

Try email marketing for free today!