**ADOLESCENCE IS A CRITICAL WINDOW FOR LEARNING**

For students to succeed in college, career, and life, they need to be able to:

- Master Academic Content
- Collaborate
- Think Critically
- Develop Social & Emotional Skills
- Communicate Effectively
- Solve Problems

Adolescence is the time to develop these skills.

**Why? Adolescents’ brains are growing and changing as they prepare for adulthood.**

**THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN IS**

- **Hardwiring Important Skills**
  Connections related to important skills become stronger, and connections to skills that are not being used are removed.

- **Becoming More Efficient**
  The brain increases speed between connections, making them more efficient.

- **Preparing for Change**
  Experiences during the adolescent years drive the brain to adapt for future needs.

- **Creating Connections**
  The brain starts creating more complex connections, making it easier to engage in advanced thinking and mental tasks.

It is not enough to invest only in early childhood and elementary education. Students are more likely to succeed when they receive continuous support throughout development.

**Early childhood intervention only**
- 66% high school graduation rate
- 13% enrolled in college

**Early childhood and adolescent intervention**
- 82% high school graduation rate
- 27% enrolled in college

Supporting students throughout development:
- 91% high school graduation rate
- 38% enrolled in college

**HERE’S WHAT YOU CAN DO**

Connect academic learning to students’ personal interests, prior knowledge, and current events.

Design instructional programs and resources that allow students to engage in complex thinking. This can occur through academic instruction or extracurricular opportunities, such as debate or robotics clubs.

Structure assignments and assessments that require students to solve complex problems and connect information to their own experiences, rather than simply regurgitate memorized information.

Guide students through increasingly complex social environments by providing opportunities to develop social and emotional skills and emotion-regulation strategies through built-in time during the school day or designated advisory periods.
Report 1: How Body and Brain Development Affect Student Learning
Adolescence is a critical window for student learning and development. The first report of the series highlights SAL research and describes the key biological, cognitive, social, and emotional development processes that occur during the adolescent years and their implications for education practice and policy.

Report 2: Risk Taking, Rewards, and Relationships
Supporting adolescent risk taking and relationship building can increase adolescents’ motivation to learn and even improve their ability to learn. Using neuroscience, and social and psychological research, the second report of the series highlights how educators and leaders can shift their thinking about adolescent behavior to capitalize on the unique learning opportunities of this developmental stage.

Coming Soon Report 3: Valuing Culture, Experiences, and Environments
Culture and learning environments, inside and outside of school and online, affect the learning opportunities adolescent students experience as well as their development and capacity to learn. The third report explains the growing research about how stress affects learning and how the intersection of school and societal cultures supports or hinders educational outcomes of diverse student populations.

Coming Soon Report 4: How Identity and Empowerment Influence Student Learning
Providing adolescent students with opportunities to shape their own learning experiences supports their identity development and their learning outcomes. The fourth report of the series discusses how in-school and out-of-school contexts nurture or obstruct student voice and agency. The report also highlights neuroscience research for educators and leaders to inform their decisionmaking when designing developmentally appropriate adolescent learning opportunities.

Visit all4ed.org/SAL to learn more about All4Ed’s SAL initiative.

---


The Alliance for Excellent Education (All4Ed) is a Washington, DC–based national policy, practice, and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those underperforming and those historically underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. all4ed.org

© Alliance for Excellent Education, September 2018.