Integrating Social Emotional Learning with Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Alaska School Psychologists Association
October 6, 2017

Moving Upstream:
A Story of Prevention and Intervention
“It occurred to me that someone ought to go upstream and find out why so many kids were falling into the river. What I found is that the old wooden bridge had several planks missing, and when some children tried to jump over the gap, they could not make it and fell through into the river. So I got someone to fix the bridge.”

Risk factors that create “Barriers to Learning"

- Poverty
- Exposure to violence or drug use
- Historical trauma or institutional racism
- Absent or infirm parents
- Behavioral and cognitive disabilities
- Court-involved – juvenile justice
- Foster care

Failure to address multiple problems early on can lead to **systems spillover**.
Schools are victim of **systems spillover**.
Children’s Mental Health Needs in Alaska

Mental Health Snapshot


In 2014–2015, Alaska’s annual average percentage of major depressive episode (MDE) among adolescents aged 12–17 was similar to the corresponding national annual average percentage.
Teen suicide rate 15-19 per 100,000 teens (5-year average)
Need for Mental Health Supports

- Divorce
- Financial difficulties
- Homelessness
- Sickness
- Violence
- Deployment
- Death
- Unemployment
- Bullying
- Academic difficulties
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

- **traumatic events** such as abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence experienced early in life frequently have **destructive effects** that can last into adulthood
- **powerful relationship** between our **emotional experiences** as children and our **physical and mental health** as adults
- it is the **number of ACEs** experienced—not the type—that predicts a child’s likelihood to experience health problems in adulthood
- ACEs are “the **most important determinant of the health and wellbeing** of our nation.”
Addressing Children’s Mental Health in Schools
What is Mental Health?

- Mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness but also encompasses social, emotional, and behavioral wellness and the ability to cope with life’s challenges.

Contrasting Perspectives

Focus of Intervention

**Education System**
- Behavior Management,
- Skill Development,
- Academic Improvement

**Mental Health System**
- Insight,
- Awareness,
- Improved Emotional Functioning
Perspectives

Common Focus

**Education / Mental Health System**

Improving Social and Adaptive Functioning.
Importance of and Need to Increase Availability, Access, and Range of Services

---

Refocus School-Based Mental Health Services On the Core Foundation of Schools:

To Promote Learning
The Refocused Role of Mental Health Services

- Support Teachers: the *Primary Change Agents*
- Mental Health Providers Become: “*Educational Enhancers*”
- Serve the Core Function of Schools
- Promoting Social/Emotional Development, no Longer Tangential

Social and Emotional Learning as a Protective Factor
What is SEL?
Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Theoretical Foundations of SEL
- grounded in the field of positive youth development
- the needs of youth must be addressed by creating environments or settings that promote outcomes like school achievement, mutually supportive relationships with adults and peers, problem solving, and civic engagement
- focused on enhancing skills, building assets, and promoting resilience to achieve positive outcomes
- roots in ecological systems theory and self-determination theory
Ecological Systems Theory

• Posits that the settings youth inhabit, like school, shape their development
• Features of school settings that are related to positive youth development include opportunities for empowerment and skill building, the presence of supportive adults and peers, and being safe and orderly

Self-Determination Theory

• Youth are more likely to flourish when in settings that address their social and emotional needs, such as experiencing meaningful relationships, having confidence in their abilities, and feeling autonomous
• Students are more likely to thrive in classrooms that foster meaningful, caring, safe, and empowering interactions
Goals of SEL

- Promote students’ self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship, and responsible decision-making skills
- Improve student attitudes and beliefs about self, others, and school
- Better test scores, more confident students with a greater drive for success

Theory of Change for SEL
Benefits of SEL

- Social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and worker, and many risky behaviors (e.g., drug use, violence, bullying, and dropping out) can be prevented or reduced when multiyear, integrated efforts are used to develop students’ social and emotional skills.

Positive Impact of SEL

- Better academic performance
- Improved attitude and behaviors
- Fewer negative behaviors
- Reduce emotional distress
Importance of Addressing Social & Emotional Competencies

• “A study estimating the relative influence of 30 different categories of education, psychological, and social variables on learning revealed that social and emotional variables exerted the most powerful influence on academic performance.” -CASEL, 2003

Meta-Analysis of Follow-Up Effects – August 2017

• Students in school-based SEL interventions continued to demonstrate significant positive benefits
• Significantly improving skills, positive attitudes, prosocial behavior, and academic performance
• Serve as a protective factor against the development of subsequent problems
• Consistent positive effects were found for SEL interventions with student populations from different racial groups and socioeconomic statuses.

• Various social and emotional assets will be associated with significant improvement in students’ long-term adjustment.

• Positive effects on several additional important developmental outcomes.
What do teachers and other adults actually need to do in the classroom and school to help students develop Social & Emotional Competencies?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Developmental Tasks of Social and Emotional Competence Across the Grade Spans*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preschool</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Become and be engaged, socially and academically,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Manage emotions (appropriately for a young child), especially with adult support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stay connected to adults, while beginning to develop peer relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In play and learning, pay attention and follow directions, wait, sit still, and effectively join and leave groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elementary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Become increasingly successful at navigating peer relationships and friendships independent of adult support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Show and share emotions appropriately, and with appropriate people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle and High School</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Form closer relationships with peers of both genders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Manage increasingly complex academic content and tasks, with increasing independence from adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Effectively manage transitions to middle and high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increase independence from adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Begin preparing for adult roles (e.g., become more nurturing to younger children, begin preparing and practicing for work roles).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop an ethical value system that allows for responsible decision-making and responsible behavior toward self and others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Drawn from Denham (2015).
At the classroom level

- Quality of teacher-student interactions is one of the most important predictors of student academic performance and adjustment
- Students who report feeling listened to by teachers, involved in decisions that affect their lives, provided with opportunities to exert autonomy, and accepted by peers are more motivated and perform better in school
Interpersonal and organizational factors at the school level

• School Climate –
  – quality of the relationships students have with teachers and peers
  – clarity and consistency of school rules
  – physical safety of the school
• Students who perceive a positive climate in their school demonstrate higher levels of social competence and report fewer personal problems
• Positive school climate in middle and high school is associated with academic achievement, decreased absenteeism, and lower rates of suspension

Four Strategies that Promote SEL
General teaching practices

- Create classroom and schoolwide conditions that facilitate and support social and emotional development in students
  - Establish positive and predictable classroom environments
  - Promote positive teacher-student relationships
  - Provide ongoing instructional practices that support students’ SEL
Integration of skill instruction and practices that support SEL within the context of an academic curriculum

- Social and Emotional Learning Competencies are infused into the existing curriculum
- Programs are designed to use various curriculum areas (e.g., English, Social Studies, reading) for a dual purpose

Guidance to administrators and school leaders on how to facilitate SEL as a schoolwide initiative

- Restructuring the school’s organizational structures, operations, and academic, social, and emotional learning goals
- Create policies and organizational structures within a school or school system that support students’ social and emotional development
Free-standing lessons

- provide explicit, step-by-step instructions to teach students social and emotional competencies across the five core competency clusters
- classroom activities develop specific skills using strategies that are sequenced within and across lessons
- promote generalization by including opportunities for practicing skills beyond the lesson and throughout the day

Research on SEL implementation suggests that the most effective strategies include

- **Sequenced**—connected and coordinated activities to foster skills development
- **Active**—active forms of learning to help students master new skills
- **Focused**—containing a component that emphasizes developing social and emotional skills
- **Explicit**—targeting specific social and emotional skills
Selecting an SEL Program

Key principles support the effective selection, implementation, impact, and sustainability of SEL programs

• School and district teams should engage diverse stakeholders in the program adoption process to identify shared priorities
• Implementing evidence-based SEL programs within systemic, ongoing district and school planning, programming, and evaluation
• Consider local contextual factors
Evidenced-Based MTSS

Evidenced-based Programs

• Have been evaluated and research produces the expected results which are attributed to the program rather than other factors
• Have been evaluated by experts in the field other than the creators of the program
• Have been declared as evidence-based by a federal agency or a respected research group or registry
Difficult in schools

• implemented with fidelity
• involvement of heterogeneous populations
• high caseloads
• types of services beyond the immediate interventions
• the organization of the setting
• the culture and climate of the setting
• the motivation of those who will implement programs.

• CSPV: Prevention Research Center for the Promotion of Human Development at Penn State, the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. http://prevention.psu.edu/
• CSMHA: Center for School Mental Health at the University of Maryland School of Medicine (Recognized Evidence-based Programs Implemented by Expanded. School Mental Health Programs). http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/Resources/Clin/QAI/Rsrc/Summary%20of%20Recognized%20Evidence%20Based%20Programs6.14.08.doc
• The California Evidence-based Clearinghouse. http://www.cebc4cw.org/search/select
Collaborative for Academic, Social, & Emotional Learning Guides

casel.org/middle-and-high-school-edition-casel-guide/

Culturally Responsive, Embedded, Social and Emotional Learning in Alaska
Alongside foundational skills in social and emotional learning, culturally congruent learning environments are essential to the implementation of effective strategies and student success in low performance and high minority schools

- Association of Alaska School Board’s Initiative for Community Engagement

Cultural congruence includes

- curriculum content relevant to diverse students’ lives
- compatibility between the behavioral norms of schools, and students’ home cultures
- inclusion of the language of instruction and students’ home language
- connection between the pedagogy used in classrooms and the traditional teaching methods familiar to students
Culturally Responsive SEL

- Rural Native students are leaving school at high rates, in part, because of cross-cultural disconnect and the inability to find meaning in culturally dissonant classrooms.
- By making classroom instruction and SEL more congruent with the cultural value systems of a diverse student population we can build on cultural knowledge, experiences, and frames of reference to make learning more relevant.

Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools

- developed by a collaborative between the Department of Education and Early Development and representatives from each region of Alaska.
- endorsed by Native Associations and educational organizations in each region of the state and is the foundation for establishing culturally responsive SEL supports.
MTSS and SEL in Alaska

Culture for Learning: District-Wide Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tiers</th>
<th>Key Dimensions</th>
<th>MTSS Structure of Support for Behavioral &amp; Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Tier 1: Universal Supports | All adults work to establish positive learning environments by setting clear expectations & building relationships with students. | Build school-wide systems and structures:  
- School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS)  
- Foundations – School-based Behavior Leadership Team (BLT)  
- Adapt proactive & restorative behavior management strategies:  
  - CHAMPS  
  - Restorative Practices/Alternatives to Suspension  
  - Mentoring/Youth Motivator Programs |
| Tier 2: Targeted Supports | Students practice & apply social & emotional skills & have opportunities to build relationships. | Implement best practices for student engagement/SEL:  
- Responsive Classroom  
- RULER Program  
- Teaching Tools for Young Children (Pre-k & Kindergarten) |
| Tier 3: Specialized Supports | Adults model social-emotional skills in all interactions. | Support SEL for adults:  
- Community among adults encouraged by instructional leaders  
- Staff recognition & practices at all levels  
- Self-reflection & goal-setting = Deliberate Practice Plan (DPP) |

Students with the highest levels of need receive highly-structured, individualized, and tiered interventions. Identify specific student needs and deliver individualized intervention:  
- Individual Mental Health Counseling  
- Check-In/Check-Out  
- Coping Skills Instruction  
- Second Step Anger Management Program  
- Community Mental Health First Aid  
- Community Mental Health (Group)  
- Social skills Improvement System (Sabis)  
- Why Try  
- Targeted, Individualized Intervention  
- Community Agency Involvement  
- Function-based behavior planning  
- Coping Skills
SEL Anchorage

• Handouts –
  – Elementary Framework SEL/Behavior
  – Secondary Framework SEL/Behavior
• Anchorage School District K-12 Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Standards and Indicators

So, how’s that working out?
Self-Assessment

- Personal Assessment and Reflection—SEL Competencies for School Leaders, Staff, and Adults

Additional Resources