



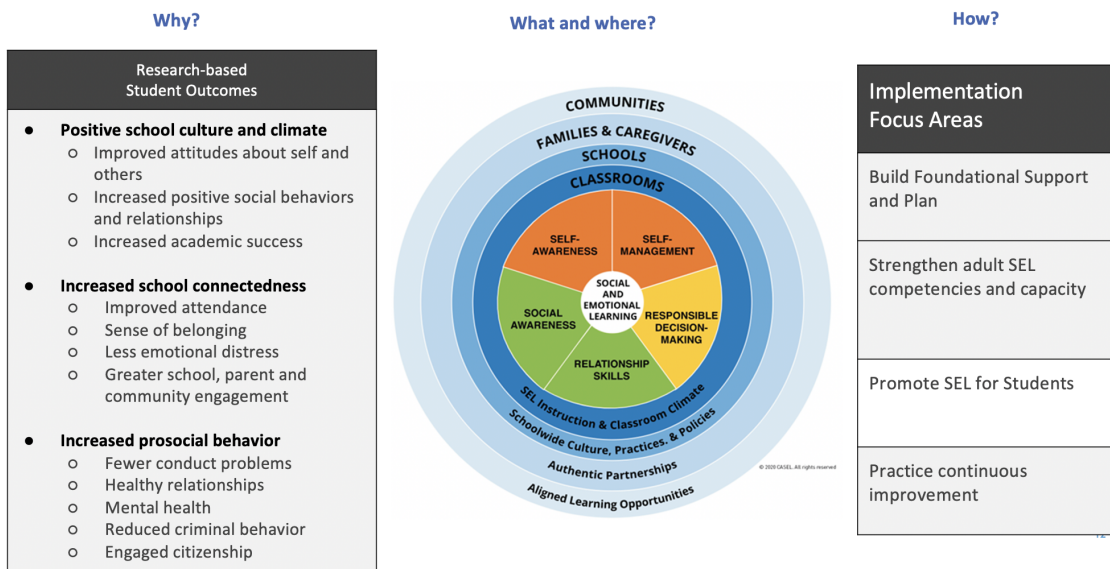
Superintendent Update

DERRY TOWNSHIP SD | SEPTEMBER 30 2021

COMPONENTS OF SEL INSTALLMENT #1 BY DR. WINSLOW

In this series of newsletters, I am going to walk us through the components of Social Emotional Learning that are the focus of our work this school year. The work of rebuilding relationships and student engagement is essential to bringing students back into the fold of learning, and this is the work we have set about doing.

“Crisis created the disruption for us. Which means we have an opportunity to put the pieces back in a different shape.” ~ Simon Sinek



The initial focus of our Social Emotional Learning (SEL) studies is the component of Safe and Supportive Schools and Classrooms Environments, which encompasses the following:

- Safety
- Belonging
- Connection and Relationships
- Engagement

Safety.

The anatomy of a safe environment includes both visible and invisible elements. The visible elements are feeling protected from violence, theft, and exposure to weapons and threats. We create these spaces by “hardening” our buildings. We ensure we have top of the line security systems, we add protective glaze to walls of windows, we create detailed practices and procedures to keep dangerous people and materials out of our buildings and away from our students. Physical safety is an extremely important part of creating a safe learning environment for our children, but it is only one part of the overall picture. It is really rather easy to harden a building, while it is far more difficult to do the messier work of creating psychological safety. As an educational institution it is important to note where we spend our time and money as it illuminates what we value. As a district we have committed to multiple SEL coaches, extensive core team training and monthly full-staff training in each of our buildings. We value this work as it creates an environment that allows students to feel confident in taking risks and trying new things and promotes a level of comfort for expressing emotions and being true to one’s identity without fear of rejection or humiliation. Students are secure in this type of space knowing that mistakes won’t be ridiculed.

Belonging.

Why is it so important to belong? And how is it different than fitting in? Linda Darling-Hammond said, “As human beings, one of the most essential needs we have is the need to belong.” When students truly feel that they belong, they do not have a need to change or hide anything about themselves. There is not a need to conform in order to find acceptance. Many times in schools we value achievement over who our children are. We want to know what they can do and allow this to take priority over relationship and belonging. The achievement era launched by No Child Left Behind brought the focus of equity onto access to rigorous coursework. The much publicized “achievement gap” would be more aptly named a “curriculum gap.” Access absolutely matters (as detailed in a previous newsletter), while research shows that belonging matters just as much. (Allen, et al, 2018). Cobb and Krownapple (2019), define belonging as “the extent to which people feel appreciated, validated, accepted and treated fairly within an environment.”

➡➡➡➡➡ "Fitting in"

is becoming who you think you need to be in order to be accepted.

Belonging ←←←←←

is being your authentic self and knowing that no matter what happens, you belong to you.

For students (and adults for that matter) it means that they are not preoccupied, worried, or distracted about being treated as a stereotype. Rather, they are confident that they are a valued member of a group of learners.

Connection and Relationship

Belonging is inextricably tied to Connection and Relationship. Abraham Maslow taught us that our self-worth is tied to belonging and that without this sense of “worthiness” we are less able to achieve. Our self-worth, according to Maslow, rises when we are connected to others, a part of a community. When we have the connections of family, friends, school and community we feel that we are worthwhile, that others want our presence and our ideas - which leads us to be greater contributors and drives our achievement. In other words, students feel more connected to their school when they believe the teachers in their classrooms care about them as individuals as well as how much they are learning.

Engagement

Engagement in this sense refers to a student’s interest and enthusiasm for school. Throughout the pandemic, student engagement, or lack thereof, has been a huge red flag in regard to student well-being. A lack of engagement has been the signal that has driven teachers to ever more innovative and persistent strategies.

Engagement along with self-awareness is a primary focus as we get this school year underway. As a team, we are working hard and doubling down to get students to re-engage. Social emotional learning skills help us to re-engage if we have disengaged. As we explore practices and strategies to share with teachers, we emphasize these 9 drivers of student engagement:

- Access and Opportunity
- Evidence of High Expectations
- Autonomy, Self-Direction, & Ownership
- Collaboration
- Authenticity and Responsiveness
- Self-efficacy
- Self-regulation
- Relational Connection
- Fun

As we continue to navigate the effects of the pandemic, our focus on social-emotional learning allows us to create an environment where children feel welcomed, respected and loved which in turn allows them to re-engage in school and re-embrace the many joys of learning.

Sources:

- Allen, K., Kern, M.L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 30, 1.
- Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to lead*. Random House.
- CASEL. (n.d.). <http://www.casel.org>.
- Cobb, F., & Krownapple, J. (2019). *Belonging through a culture of dignity*. Mimi & Todd.

WHAT ARE WE READING AND LISTENING TO?



Lincoln on Leadership by Donald T. Phillips is a classic leadership book that walks the reader through Lincoln's leadership skills and how they apply to our work today. There is classic and important advice that ranges from common sense (get out among the people) to the benefits of being decisive and the importance of clear communication. It's a great book to read and re-read.

The Last Archive by Jill Lepore is a podcast that uses the Last Archive as a means to explore historical events and their impact on today's beliefs and actions. In season one she explores the "murder of truth" and in season two has taken on the development of doubt over the last century. It's a phenomenal reexamination of commonly understood historical facts through a new lens.

