



Superintendent Update

DERRY TOWNSHIP SD | JULY 15 2021

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

BY DR. WINSLOW

The emotional and mental health of students has long been a top district priority. We are fortunate to have begun work in this area over a decade ago and have been gradually educating staff and implementing programming. The development of the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption that it caused to schools has created a greater sense of urgency and a hyper-awareness of the well-being of our children.

While societies have certainly been through collective traumatic events throughout history, the global pandemic that began in late 2019 is the first (and hopefully only) for the majority of our current generations. We have all experienced this event with some level of stress - perhaps from our own or a family member's illness, perhaps from job loss or financial instability, or perhaps from the stress of shifting family dynamics while we were all in lockdown.

Any one or combination of these has been experienced by the majority of our communities and this long term, constant hum of medium to high stress takes its toll on adults and children alike. On top of it all is a great deal of uncertainty which "feeds anxiety, fear, and anger - emotions that hinder the ability to read social cues and adopt someone else's perspective." (Fagell, 2021)

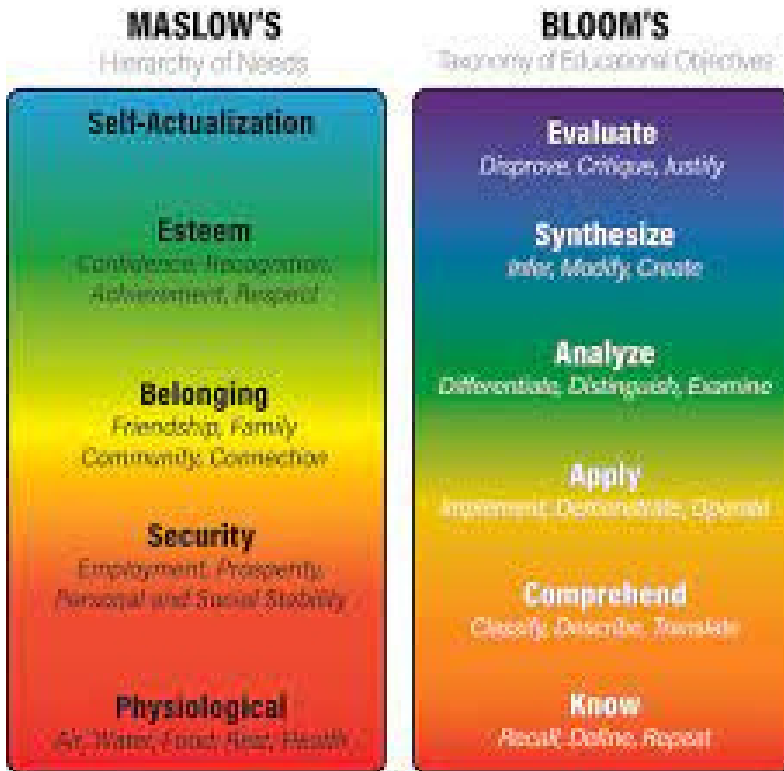
Taking all of these circumstances into account, as well as what we know about stress and grief in children (yes, there is a grieving process happening - much has been lost in the last 18 months) it is imperative that we continue our work to implement and integrate social emotional learning into our daily practices.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Defined

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (www.casel.org)



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A popular refrain in education is “Maslow before Bloom.” Essentially this phrase recognizes that academic and social emotional skills are inextricably linked. A strong SEL framework promotes educators who feel emotionally balanced, avoid burnout, and have strong relationships with their students, peers, and supervisors. Students who have deeper relationships with their teachers and classmates experience deeper learning because they are free to

take risks, meet challenges, and independently problem-solve. Social emotional learning in schools create learning environments that are safe, community focused, and promote a sense of belonging. In creating this type of culture, disparities between groups are erased and all are appreciated and welcomed.

As shared above, the district has been working on SEL implementation for quite a long time. Programming you may be familiar with includes:

- Structured play in Kindergarten
- K-1 Social Skills essential arts class
- K-5 Second Step curriculum
- Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions (PBIS)
- JA Biztown
- COCOA Course in 6th Grade
- Middle School Advisory
- Bridge Days
- Instructional Coach for SEL
- Social Emotional Learning Lab
- WeB and LINK Crew
- Professional Learning in: Foundations of SEL, Restorative Practices, Mindfulness, Executive Functioning, PBIS

What is on the Horizon for the 2021-22 School Year?

As we bring students and staff back to school in the fall, there will be a strong emphasis on SEL professional learning for staff. All of the district 2-hour late starts will be devoted to the further education of teachers in essential social emotional practices. Each building has a full or part-time instructional coach with a focus on social emotional learning to help build knowledge as well

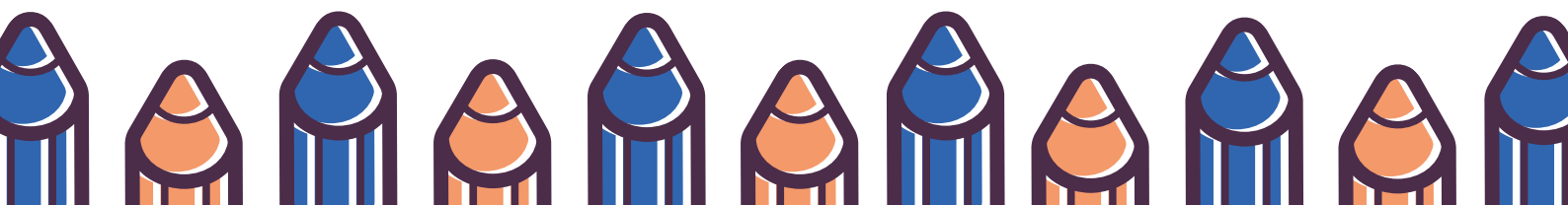
as support building initiatives like PBIS, the Social Emotional Learning Lab, and the Trojan Center. In grades K-8 there will be a daily morning meeting to help students center themselves and focus for the day. At the high school, extended homeroom will be used to front load a new SEL curriculum focused on high school appropriate topics like responsible decision-making and self-management. We are prepared for students to need time to adjust back to school and are implementing programming that will support student well-being thus allowing students to access all the wonderful resources and opportunities that Hershey Schools have to offer.

Sources:

CASEL. (n.d.). <http://www.casel.org>

Fagell, P. L. (2021). Coping with Change and Uncertainty. Educational Leadership, 78(4), 22-26.

Sprenger, M. (2020). Social Emotional Learning and the Brain. ASCD.



WHAT ARE WE READING AND LISTENING TO?



Social Emotional Learning and the Brain by Marilee Sprenger - In this book Sprenger discusses how brain structure and function play an important role in the learning process. She highlights the core components of social emotional learning and illustrates strategies and practical applications to build each component into regular classroom practices.

Revisionist History by Malcom Gladwell

- Season 6 of Revisionist History (Gladwell's podcast on things "overlooked and misunderstood") just dropped. He starts the season with a review of a self-driving car and then in the next two available episodes begins to explore the rankings and ratings of American Universities. If you are new to Revisionist History I recommend starting with a couple of my favorites: Season 1, Episode 9 Generous Orthodoxy; Season 2, Episode 6 The King of Tears; Season 2, Episode 3 Miss Buchanan's Period of Adjustment; Season 3 Bonus: Malcolm Debates Adam Grant

