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SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING:

LEADING A SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

ESTEAM: EMPATHY AND INNOVATION WORKING HAND IN HAND

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Social and Emotional Learning

A message from
Dr. Regina K. Huffman
SAANYS President 2018-2019

In this era of academic accountability, our schools have been inundated with various well-intended programs to promote student awareness and proficiency. This has been done to address not only the foundational academic requirements but also the overall needs of each individual child. However, our current educational policies are trapped in the age of production lines, while our global society proceeds at the speed of light in the information age. To be quite frank, our educational system is as antiquated as the telegraph and has not kept pace with our changing world. Programs such as character education, drug education, health education, multicultural education, career education, and violence prevention, to name a few, are platforms that contribute to the multifaceted systems and processes that make up today's learning environments. Too often these concepts are presented in isolation, and even though they have distinct characteristics, they are key contributors to the overall future success of our students. They are also some of the programs that address social and emotional learning.

What is social and emotional learning (SEL)? As defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), "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."

According to CASEL, there are some basic skills and competencies that must be obtained for our students to be successful not just in school but in the workplace and in life. Some of the basic core competencies and skills include:

- **Self-awareness:** Accurately recognize emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.
- **Self-management:** Successfully regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.
- **Social awareness:** Take the perspective of others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures.
- **Relationship skills:** Establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships.
- **Responsible decision making:** Make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions.

The Committee for Children has identified ways in which developing these crucial skills in SEL may facilitate future success. Listed below are a few examples.

- **Empathy:** The root of amazing customer service and product creation.
- **Impulse control:** Calm down and rewrite that angry email.
- **Emotion recognition:** Notice the mood of the room and tailor your big pitch.
- **Emotion management:** Keep those emotions from the recent family dispute in check.
- **Communication:** Listen, focus, and make the most of every relationship.
- **Assertiveness:** Get what you want, get what you need – everyone still leaves happy.

- **Problem solving:** Face roadblocks and brainstorm solutions with ease.

These examples are a clear indication that social and emotional skills are essential for success in the 21st century and beyond. Even though these skills and competencies are listed as individual elements, they should be integrated as part of the interlocking woven fabric of knowledge and skills our students acquire as they enter and progress through our schools.

Teachers may ask, "How can I incorporate SEL, with everything else that I must do?" A simple method would be to provide students with many opportunities to work with a partner or in small groups on activities and school projects. This will provide students with a chance to practice group decision-making and conflict resolution skills. Students will also learn teamwork and cooperation in these group settings. Many teachers are already doing this. It is important to gain independent knowledge, but our students have the potential to gain more from each other. *USA Today* had a blog that reminded educators "when integrating SEL not to forget the important connection between home, school, and the community." They stressed the necessity of "fostering partnerships with community organizations to allow students to improve their social awareness through service-learning opportunities."

When a person decides to become an educator, it is usually not just to teach content but to play a small role in the growth and development of children on the path to becoming successful adults. Meria Joel Carstarphen, superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools, states, "From my perspective, I am responsible for ensuring our public school system provides the type of education that is good for all students and not just some, and that requires a balance of three things—it's a third academic achievement, a third practical skills and rich experiences, and a third authentic engagement." She believes that SEL supports all three of these educational components by teaching students goal-setting and communication skills, teamwork and problem-solving skills, as well as empathy and emotion-management skills that will be utilized in college, their careers, and throughout their lives. Alonda Williams, senior director of education at Microsoft, and Matt Segneri, director of Social Enterprise Initiative (SEI) at Harvard Business School, have identified other benefits to SEL that assist in this growth process. According to Alonda Williams, SEL can be beneficial in two ways. "First, in younger age groups, SEL provides tools that allow children to focus more on instruction and less on social situations in the classroom, at home, or in other social environments. Second, children who have been exposed to SEL instruction and effectively trained educators can together achieve meaningful improvements in academic performance." Matt Segneri goes further by identifying how SEL also affects future leadership: "Leadership today requires empathy to attract, nurture, and retain the best talent, and to meet stakeholders and customers where they are. Empathy is a skill that yields better choices and decisions—based on the needs of others and the needs of the community."

As educators, parents, and community members we want students to demonstrate proficiency and mastery in academic subjects, but more importantly foster a passion for lifelong learning. We want students who have social and emotional skills, a great work ethic, and values that provide a foundation for a meaningful career, engaged citizenship, and happy life. More than 2,000 years ago Aristotle taught, "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all." This is just as true today as it was then. Social and emotional learning (SEL) enables us to educate the whole child.

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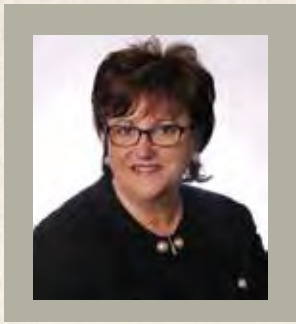
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Every day students enter classrooms across the state facing challenges that can have a direct impact on their ability to learn. These challenges can be any number of things including hunger, mental health challenges, trauma, or stress. Unfortunately many students lack the social and emotional aptitudes to benefit from classroom instruction when faced with these challenges. The good news is, research shows that students benefit academically when educators integrate social emotional learning into their classroom environments. When schools provide a climate of support, it can help students cope with events occurring in their lives outside of the classroom.

The New York State Education Department has made social emotional learning a priority and remains focused intently on providing schools with the tools they need to give all students an education that meets the principles associated with educating the "whole child." At its core, the state's ESSA plan is about fostering equity throughout the educational system. It's a multipronged strategy that involves mental health instruction, social emotional learning, and creating safe learning environments so our schools are welcoming places for all.

To that end, we're working to help schools as they begin to implement policies and programs that promote social emotional learning and a positive school climate. Social emotional learning tools can help both adults and children acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to understand and manage their emotions.

In order for social emotional learning to be truly effective, the guiding principles must be embodied by everyone in our school communities, not just our students. We all need ongoing social emotional support and development. Consciously fostering social emotional learning and regularly practicing social emotional learning skills can help educators be happier, healthier, more productive, less reactive, and make better decisions, which in turn helps them be stronger supporters for students. Ultimately, it can enhance our work toward better academic performance, improved school climate, reduce exclusionary discipline, and increase educational equity.

The guidance and resources that the department released in March, entitled "Social Emotional Learning: A Guide to Systemic Whole School Implementation," were designed to facilitate systemic whole school implementation and include district-developed resources aligning social emotional learning competencies, academic standards, classroom activities, and teaching practices. It provides resources and tools to support districts, schools, and individual educators in their work to create schools that effectively prepare all students to succeed in school and in life. Each implementation component addressed in this toolkit reflects a commitment to creating and sustaining a school culture and climate that enables all young people to thrive.

These tools and resources build upon guidance and benchmarks released in May 2018, including "New York State Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks for Voluntary Implementation" and "Social Emotional Learning: Essential for Learning, Essential for Life, a framework explaining SEL concepts, and the need for and benefit of SEL in New York."

Additionally, the department has made several district-developed content area crosswalk documents available on its website to provide examples of how social emotional learning can be incorporated in and aligned with subject area content to support state learning standards. Additional crosswalks will be posted as they become available.

To build on and complement the guidance and resources available to educators, a series of regional professional learning sessions will be coming this summer. The sessions will give educators opportunities not only to learn more about social emotional learning, but to interact with peers in their region to discuss ideas, current work and plans, and to develop interdistrict relationships that can help support effective implementation.

Creating an environment where the mental and emotional well-being of all is valued and fostered, free from stigma, is essential to helping students feel safe and accepted. All our students need to know they are not alone and there are people who want to help them learn, grow, and to feel safe, protected, and loved. I thank you all for your efforts in pursuing this goal and look forward to working with you as we continue to move forward to see it fully achieved.
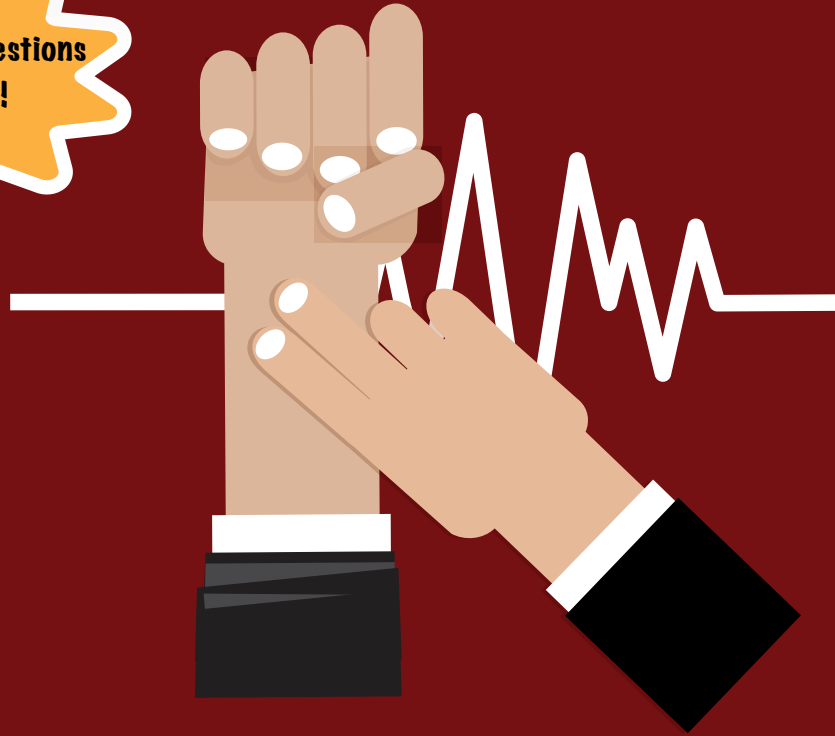
LEADING

A Social Emotional Learning Environment

By Dominique Smith
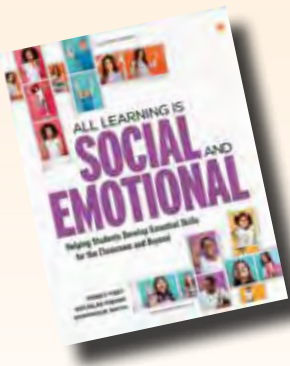
Social emotional learning (SEL) is hot. There's no question about it. And there's good reason for that. **Every interaction that educators have with children and youth provides an opportunity to build students' social and emotional skills.** But when something is hot, there is a risk that it is seen as a fad. When something in education is a fad, it is often seen as one more thing that teachers, who are already stretched pretty thin, have to add. Or worse, there are minimal compliance attempts to say, "We do that, too." In these cases, students fail to benefit and teachers come to believe that this too shall pass.

The thing is, social and emotional learning is already happening in your school. It lives in the hidden curriculum, out of sight and out of mind, but happening nonetheless. If all of these hidden curriculum messages were positive, we wouldn't need to focus attention on it. But they're not. Much of the social and emotional learning students experience is counter to the goals of growing young people who have the skills they need to function in a complex social society. Take, for example, a comment someone recently made in response to an egregious act of a couple of students: "Boys will be boys." No. Boys will be what they are taught. And if they are not taught that bullying and inappropriate touching are wrong, they won't learn it.

Here's a seemingly more benign example. Two students on the playground get into an argument. Feelings are hurt. One of the students is crying and the other is very angry, at least by the look on his face. The adult on duty says to one of the students, "You're okay. There's no need to cry." And to the other, "She didn't mean it. You took it the wrong way. Now let it go." In both cases, students' emotions were discounted. They did not have the opportunity to label their emotions or learn appropriate responses to those emotions. Instead, they were encouraged to repress their emotions, not talk about it, and move on. Yes, social and emotional learning is happening all of the time in your school, but it's not always positive.

So why SEL? SEL is an effort to focus on the whole child, recognizing that children (like all of us) are complex social beings. SEL shouldn't feel like another addition to a teacher's workload but rather another tool for supporting the growth of each individual student.

In my work with my coauthors Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher on our book, *All Learning Is Social and Emotional: Helping Students Develop Essential Skills for the Classroom and Beyond*, we developed what we believe are the five tenets of SEL:

1. **Identity and Agency**
   Children's and adolescents' sense of identity is shaped by a myriad of factors, including experiences in and out of school. Likewise, their agency, which is their belief in their own ability to influence the world around them, is materially governed by their identity. Over time, students develop a mindset that they are learners who strive and persevere through challenge.

2. **Emotional Regulation**
   Young people need to understand that emotions happen, and some of those emotions negatively affect the individual and those around him or her. Emotional self regulation requires the habits of self-checking and moderating response. Students learn how to manage their behavior by accurately identifying their emotions, engaging in impulse control, and developing coping skills.

3. **Cognitive Regulation**
   Successful students need to develop the habits and dispositions to regulate their own learning. Students learn to think about their thinking (metacognition), focus their attention, set and monitor goals, recognize and resolve problems, make decisions, and develop their organizational skills.

4. **Social Skills and Relationships**
   Children and adolescents engage in relationship building, and learn what it means to be a friend and a classmate. To do so requires developing empathy, as well as pro-social skills such as sharing and teamwork, which allow productive collaboration to occur. And it requires that students learn to repair the harm they cause to others.

5. **Public Spirit**
   This is the basis for a democracy, as we create communities in which people are valued and treated fairly. Public spirit involves the development of students' character, their respect for others, ethical responsibilities, a sense of justice, perseverance in the face of injustice, and leadership.

These five areas are directly influenced, positively or negatively, by the adults who work in a school building. As leaders of schools, we should be targeting these tenets with purpose, supporting teachers to understand the ideas, and developing strategies for implementation.

For example, many students walk our campuses displaying an identity that is truly not them. Students walk around with labels such as bad kid, late kid, disruptive kid, and smart kid based on everything the adults have told them during their educational journey. As these students start to hear more and more language from the adults, their identity starts to change and they become accustomed to acting a certain way that is consistent with the story that is told about them. In other words, they live up to the identity that has been assigned. As a school leader, I ask you to examine areas on your campus that allow for identities to be built in a negative way. Observe how students are treated when they show up late. Is it with a smile and thank-you for being here or is it shame and humiliation? Do your staff tell students, "You're late"? Hint: the student already knows that. Or do your staff ask if everything is okay and how they can help the young person get closer and closer to arriving on time? That may seem to be a minor thing, but students report that the initial interactions they have with adults influence how they act throughout the day.

Further, I encourage you to assess how your teachers address students who misbehave in class. Do they have a system of understanding and searching for what is happening to that student or is it purely punitive and reactive? Leaders must help guide teachers into a different realm of thinking when working with our students who exhibit problematic behavior. Asking staff to be more proactive and relationship focused isn't adding more time to the teachers' workday but rather granting permission to teachers for them to use

their precious instructional minutes to support the student in any aspect they need. As we walk through classrooms our hopes should be that students are learning and that our teachers are making significant impacts on our students' lives. We should be getting to a place where our school shifts from saying, "What's wrong with that student?" to the language of "What happened to that student?" When students misbehave, they need to understand their emotional state and the actions that would be more pro-social when in that state. Of course, there are logical consequences for problematic behavior but simply punishing a student, or threatening to punish them in an effort to get them to comply, does not teach them how to behave in the future. The key is for students to learn that their actions – behavior – impacts other people. When students have positive, growth-producing relationships with teachers and then do something wrong, they want to repair those relationships. Over time, and with feedback, student behavior begins to change in significant ways.

Speaking of relationships, when you visit classrooms don't limit your focus to instruction. Consider the ways in which your teachers develop, maintain, and repair relationships with students and themselves and with students and their peers. The research on this is clear: young people do not learn from old people they do not like. I understand that it is probably more comfortable to focus on instructional routines and to coach a teacher who does not know how to read aloud or model mathematical problem solving, but it's equally important to support all teachers in developing strong relationships with students. At the most basic level, does the teacher know the students' names? How to pronounce those names? Know at least one personal thing about each student? Beyond that, do teachers greet students, acknowledge students, demonstrate empathy, and have high expectations for students? And are all students treated with respect? There has been evidence for several decades that teachers treat students differently based on their expectations for those students, which are commonly based

on students' achievement (e.g., Good, 1987).

The low-achieving students:

- Get less wait time.
- Are criticized more often for failure.
- Are praised less frequently.
- Receive less feedback.
- Are called on less often.
- Are seated further away from the teacher.
- Have less eye contact from the teacher.
- Have fewer friendly interactions with the teacher.
- Have their ideas accepted less often.

Look for these student experiences in classrooms as you visit because the students who are lower achieving and who are treated this way are likely to learn way less. In that case, the Matthew Effect is in full force: the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The lack of a strong relationship with the teacher and low expectations from the teacher stunt learning.

Relationships are complex and sometimes harmed. When that happens, do teachers work to repair those relationships? Teachers need help, often in the form of professional learning and role playing, to learn to talk to students who have hurt their feelings. Teachers need to be comfortable telling students that their feelings have been hurt or that they are frustrated. This is not an opportunity for teachers to yell at students, saying "you did this" and "you did that," but rather an opportunity for students to hear the impact that their actions have had and to be provided an opportunity to make amends. Along the way, students and teachers learn very valuable social skills.

Thus far, I have focused on the social and emotional development of children and youth, but as the leader you are probably already thinking about the skills the adults in your school have relative to their social and emotional lives. Perhaps you have a teacher with poor social skills. Or a teacher with an inability to regulate

> It's not just one more thing to worry about. It is the thing.
> It is the thing that creates the culture at your school that allows learning to happen.

emotionally. Or a staff member who has a negative sense of self and identity. The reality is that your role is to also develop the social and emotional skills of the adults in the building. It's not just one more thing to worry about. It is the thing. It is the thing that creates the culture at your school that allows learning to happen. It is the thing that improves staff morale and reduces burnout and turnover. And it is the thing that helps people live happier lives.

I think that the same five tenets that we proposed for students also apply to the adults in the school system. As an example, let's focus on agency. Teachers with a limited sense of agency burn out and leave the profession. But before they do, they can be a toxic part of the staff. And their students are probably not learning much from them. Agency is the belief that when you act upon the world, good things happen. It's about having an impact and linking actions with outcomes.

How can you help teachers develop a stronger sense of agency? One way is to help them recognize that their instructional efforts are paying off, even if there are only currently small wins. Teachers tend to focus on the gaps in student learning and when there are many students who have unfinished learning, teachers can feel overwhelmed and come to believe that their efforts are fruitless. If the teacher is having an impact on students, academically, behaviorally, socially, or whatever, they might need help recognizing it. When you, the school leader, pay attention to the interim successes, naming and celebrating them, teachers can start to develop their agency. And when there are bigger wins, those need to be celebrated (and attributed) as well. Further, when teachers make rec-

ommendations for improvement of the school, listen carefully. If none of their suggestions are valued or implement-ed, their sense of agency can also be compromised. I'm not suggesting that everything each teacher recommends can be tried, but learn to listen and find things that can be done. And make sure that the person who suggested it in the first place knows that his or her ideas are being considered. Building teacher agency is worth your time.

Remember, social and emotional learning is happening in your school. Some of the lessons teach students how to grow and develop as humans invested in the betterment of their community. Others, not so much. You can change this. You can support teachers to integrate intentional and targeted social and emotional learning for their students. And when you do, students come to understand relationships, emotions, behavior, and learning in a whole new way.

DOMINIQUE SMITH is the chief of educational services and teacher support at Health Sciences High and Middle College in California. He is responsible for the overall instructional program as well as creating and maintaining the school climate and culture, working with the faculty and staff to ensure the education of the whole child.

Smith is the coauthor of numerous books and he is also a national trainer for the International Institute on Restorative Practices, and member of ASCD's FIT Teaching® (Framework for Intentional and Targeted Teaching®) Cadre.

RESOURCES

Frey, N., Fisher, D., and Smith, D. (2019). *All learning is social and emotional: Helping students develop essential skills for the classroom and beyond.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

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ESTEAM:

Empathy and Innovation Working Hand in Hand

By Pat Fontana

First there was STEM – science, technology, engineering, and math. Then there was STEAM, which added the A of arts to the curriculum mix. Now there is ESTEAM. **The new E is for empathy, a concept that has become more and more important in the workforce and in education.**

What is empathy? Many people confuse it with sympathy. There is no explicit expression of sorrow or sadness in empathy. It is, quite simply, the ability to understand another person's situation. When a person is empathetic, that person is able to connect with others on a deeper level, recognizing the impact that their feelings, emotions, and concerns have on challenges they may face.

Empathy has become a buzzword of sorts in the business world. Seasoned executives are learning how to incorporate the concept into workplace communications, human resources policies, and everyday operations. Empathy helps employees understand their customers and each other a little better.

What place does empathy have in education? Everything, according to Yorktown Central School District Superintendent Ron Hattar. When Dr. Hattar joined the district in 2017, STEAM was already well established in the schools there. Given his extensive experience in public schools, including six years as assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction for the Eastchester Union Free School District, he recognized the need for students to think critically and analytically and to be problem solvers, in addition to the practical skills they were learning as part of their science, technology, engineering, arts, and math classes.

A former high school math teacher with a teaching certification in special education, Dr. Hattar has lived in Yorktown for 11 years and has two children who attend Yorktown schools. He understands that the world is changing at a rapid pace and says of his district, "We're preparing our students for careers that may not exist and to solve problems that we don't know are problems yet."

A MAGICAL **COALESCENCE**

ESTEAM is the focus for all 3,450 students in grades K-12 throughout the Yorktown Central School District. Dr. Hattar believes that empathy is a skill that can be taught, but states that "empathy already resides within our children." The district offers explicit instruction in empathy throughout its high school, middle school, and three elementary schools, tapping into the students' "intrinsic ability to empathize."

Empathy is a significant element in social emotional learning, as students learn how to understand others' emotions and more properly

manage their own. Empathy is key to the process of making better decisions and creating and maintaining positive relationships.

In a letter to parents in October 2017, shortly after taking over as superintendent, Dr. Hattar wrote: "This concept of ESTEAM is the magical coalescence of

kindness, sensitivity, empathy, creativity, innovation, imagination, science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics, and fun! You will also notice that we have redesigned some of our facilities to be ESTEAM labs; places where children can use the skills they learn to solve authentic, real-world problems, both large and small."

Literature and the humanities are at the foundation of ESTEAM. Tying in all of the elements of STEAM, classroom ESTEAM projects start when students engage with literature. As Dr. Hattar describes it, "Children begin to understand the circumstances of the individual, the group, and the society, and empathize with those that are experiencing whatever the difficulty might be to create and innovate solutions to those problems."

The Yorktown Central team looks to the United Nations sustainable development goals as an example for their own goals, with a focus on other societies and a bigger world. They try to address those goals in their curriculum and in their ESTEAM work.

"Empathy is a significant element in social emotional learning, as students learn how to understand others' emotions and more properly manage their own."

In fact, Dr. Hattar points out, the UN sustainable development goals have ESTEAM at their core. Those UN goals "address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice."

Keeping these goals in mind and developing empathy for the individuals in situations addressed by the UN goals are done in every grade level at this point, to varying extents. The teachers and administrators are still growing and learning, in terms of the ESTEAM concept. Defining the curriculum is a continuous process, particularly as the world and the challenges it faces continue to change.

ESTEAM PROJECTS

The ESTEAM experience begins in kindergarten. As part of their curriculum, kindergarten students read nursery rhymes, one of which is the story of Humpty Dumpty. Kindergarten students in the Yorktown Central School District read the story through a different lens, an empathetic lens.

They discussed how Humpty Dumpty feels after he falls off the wall. Then they talked about what good friends do when one of their friends falls down. The idea was to first empathize with the character and then to design a solution that will help that character.

One kindergarten class decided to design protective casings for Humpty Dumpty so he would not get hurt if he fell off the wall. With the guidance of their teacher and a group of local high school students who mentor the kindergarten students, the children designed casings that would protect a raw egg from damage when it fell. Their project was tested at an exciting

"...Children begin to understand the circumstances of the individual, the group, and the society, and empathize with those that are experiencing whatever the difficulty might be to create and innovate solutions to those problems."

outside event that involved a bucket truck raising the eggs high into the air and dropping them. The experiment was a success, as 24 out of the 25 casings designed by kindergarten students who experienced empathy for Humpty Dumpty protected the eggs.

At the middle school level, two projects significantly demonstrated the impact of empathy education within the Yorktown Central School District. One group of middle school students identified a problem among people who play video games. They realized that video games are typically designed for people who have full use of their hands, but that didn't reflect the real population.

Recognizing that many people are not able to use their hands or do not have hands, because of illness or birth defects, but that those people probably still want to play video games, the students decided to do something about the situation. They used Makey Makey and Scratch, coding software, to design video games specifically for people who do not have full use of their hands. The students used their ESTEAM education to first recognize the problem, understanding a segment of the population's situation, and then to come up with a creative and innovative solution.

Another middle school group was inspired by the book, *A Long Walk to Water*, by Linda Sue Parker. The book tells the stories of two children in Sudan, one of whom has to walk two hours to gather fresh water from a pond for her family. The middle schoolers learned that clean water is not abundantly available across the world, and they began to empathize with the girl in the story and with others who face similar challenges.

As the students read more about clean water and about countries that do not have ready access, they realized the impact that lack of available clean water can have on a society. Then they began to question how they could help with that situation and resolved to come up with a solution. The opportunity, as it turns out, was just outside their classroom.

A pond outside their school contained numerous grass clippings, twigs, and mud, a condition that made the water undrinkable. The students extracted water from that pond for their project. They then built a filter using sand, wood charcoal, and cloth, and poured the dirty water through the filter. Again, the experiment was a tremendous success, as clean water streamed through the other side. The water was so clean, in fact, that middle school principal Marie Horowitz actually drank the clean water after it was filtered. Dr. Hattar points out that these students were creating and innovating with a real sense of purpose, to make the world a better place in a very practical sense, because of their sense of empathy.

ESTEAM-focused projects are initiated, for the most part, by the students. Ideas are grounded in the literature and then augmented by technology, often suggested and guided by the teacher. Dr. Hattar emphasizes that "to take information, synthesize it and be able to communicate that information are all skills our children will need regardless of what jobs they pursue, regardless of problems they're trying to solve in life."

OPENING **NEW DOORS**

Careers for the younger students, and perhaps even some of the high schoolers, may well be in jobs and fields that don't yet exist, but the idea behind the ESTEAM concept is that the demands that will be placed on them will be consistent. They will need the ability that they are developing now to problem solve, to think critically, and to think logically.

ESTEAM "does a wonderful job

in building capacity in those skill areas," Dr. Hattar stresses. He also sees empathy impacting the students' potential success in higher education and in future careers. Combined with the STEAM basics, empathy plays a significant role in new programs that are creating new opportunities for the district's students.

Those students participate in a successful robotics team, a science Olympiad team, a science research team, as well as a middle school FIRST® LEGO® League team, activities that challenge students to think like engineers and scientists, with the added element of empathy. Future plans include an engineering course and app development course next year at the high school level.

Dr. Hattar says his own greatest strength lies in the STEAM areas, given his background and experience, and as a district they are progressing in those areas. He adds that it is "really powerful for our students to take those two components and put those together for a meaningful and powerful educational experience." Students throughout the district, immersed in the ESTEAM concept, "will be creating and innovating – for a purpose – to make our world better."

REACTIONS TO THE **ESTEAM CONCEPT**

Dr. Hattar coined the term ESTEAM shortly after his arrival as superintendent of the Yorktown Central School District in 2017. The A for arts had previously been added to the popular STEM program because "arts are inherently a part of the creativity and innovation necessary" for student success. He added the E for empathy to "continue the great work happening in character education" in the district. In fact, the Yorktown Central district has been recognized as a national school district of character.

Overall, the reaction to the new ESTEAM concept has been positive. Dr. Hattar says he has a "wonderful administrative team that has worked tirelessly to advance the vision" of the concept and adds that the coherence of the vision is so powerful that "every single employee and every single

student knows what ESTEAM is" throughout the district.

Teachers in the elementary, middle, and high schools have embraced the idea of ESTEAM and have developed their curriculum in a way that furthers the idea of including empathy in their science, technology, engineering, arts, and math lessons. Their work is backed by district leaders. Dr. Hattar emphasizes that "as the superintendent, I could not be more proud of the work our students and teachers are doing with ESTEAM."

Students and parents also embrace the ESTEAM approach, receiving the idea favorably and understanding the necessity of the thinking skills that the concept promotes. ESTEAM has been part of the Yorktown Central School District curriculum for just two years, so there are no measurable results available from graduates. However, that will change as the concept continues to be an integral part of students' education within the district and as the team continues to assess and evaluate the ESTEAM approach.

PIONEERS

The Yorktown Central School District is a pioneer in the ESTEAM concept. They are considering copyrighting the unique new term. Dr. Hattar and his team have presented their ESTEAM work at several conferences across the state and they have had several districts visit them to see firsthand how the concept works, to gain a better understanding of ESTEAM and its impact. The ESTEAM logo was designed by a student who won a contest held last year and will be used as part of the presentations and promotional activities planned by the district team.

Understanding another person's situation – their challenges, their emotions, and their needs – is the main element of empathy. Using creative and innovative problem-solving skills to design solutions to another person's challenges is the main focus of ESTEAM. Dr. Hattar and his team in the Yorktown Central School District are fostering that focus

Students who are "willing to dust themselves off after falling down... are being successful."

in their students, preparing them with the skills they need to solve problems that may not even exist yet and to be successful in an ever-changing world.

PAT FONTANA is a business writer and communications trainer with a background in corporate training and community college instruction. Her business, WordsWorking, focuses on improving workplace communications, concentrating on the fundamentals of human interactions.

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BY LISA MEADE
Assistant Superintendent
Hudson Falls Central School District
2015 NYS Middle School Principal of the
Year for SAANYS/NASSP.

UnSelfie

by Michele Borba, EdD

It was the end of a particularly difficult day and my son came into the living room to sit on the couch near my chair. I heard bits and pieces of what he was saying to me but wasn't fully engaged in the conversation. He grew impatient with my distractibility and stood up. Standing in front of me, he asked me to put away my phone and to just talk with him, face-to-face, about what we were both feeling about the day. At first, I was frustrated at his persistence yet slowly realized what a gift to connect he was presenting me with. I put away the phone and we talked, face-to-face, eye-to-eye, heart-to-heart.

At the very same time this happened with my son, I was reading the book *UnSelfie*, by Michele Borba, EdD. One would think that my response to my son would have been better than it was (without his prompting). But parenting isn't always perfect.

The book provides educators (and parents) with nine chapters of researched-based ideas and strategies that can be used immediately in our practices. Chapters are grouped into three parts: Developing Empathy, Practicing Empathy, and Living Empathy. Chapters include connections to research and real-life examples from classrooms all over the world. Strategies to implement each empathy-building skill phase are also included with age-by-age examples. Each chapter is summarized by a top five list that helps provide a useful summary of information covered within each chapter.

In Part 1, Developing Empathy, readers are reminded that teaching emotional literacy is never done through worksheets or stand-alone assemblies and activities. Building empathy within our children and even ourselves begins with a human connection. The first step explained in the book is one I should have used when my son implored me to plug in….to our conversation.

Step 1 – Stop and Tune In
Step 2 – Look Face-to-Face
Step 3 – Focus on Feelings
Step 4 – Express the Feelings

"The trick is to help children describe how they felt so that they have the emotional language the next time something happens" (p. 19). Using strategies and "nurturing the development of empathy helps children to develop a moral identity," according to Borba. "We generally behave in ways consistent with our self-image, so if we want our kids to be empathetic, they must see themselves as caring and learn to value the thoughts and feelings of others" (p. 27).

Part 2 addresses three habits that need to be developed in children. These are: mastering self-regulation, exercising compassion, and cultivating collaboration. "Managing emotions helps children to look beyond themselves, put aside what would feed their urges, and do for others. It helps kids become UnSelfies" (p. 98). Borba notes that the ability to "manage emotions is a better predictor of academic achievement than IQ, it dramatically increases your adult child's health and financial stability and it strengthens resilience so your child can bounce back from setbacks" (p. 99).

Part 3 examines two final habits students need to become "true" UnSelfies: developing moral courage and becoming a changemaker. This part aligns itself very well to the work we have all been trying to tackle within our schools in the areas of climate, culture, and bullying. She calls these students "changemakers." "Changemakers are kids who don't stand back when they see a problem, but instead step in to make a difference" (p. 193).

As educators and parent representatives in our schools come together to implement NYSED's Mental Health Education Literacy, this book should be used as a resource to enhance curriculum aligned with mental health education. School counselors and special education teachers could use this book to practice the specific age-by-age strategies that are provided as well. And parents, even the moms who have to be prompted by their own child to unplug and tune in, will find this book a hopeful read with reminders and strategies that can be used, reviewed, and revisited immediately.

Please be sure to check out the comprehensive, free educator guide for this book. It can be found at: http://micheleborba.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Unselfie-Discussion-Guide.pdf.

FYI

She Believed she could so she did

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OPINIONS

"If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far."

Daniel Goleman

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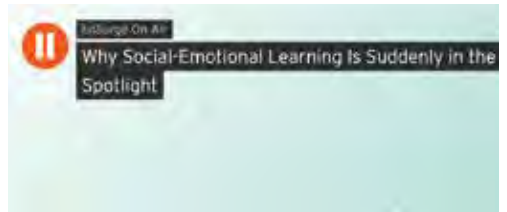
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Creating Safe and Supportive Schools:

A Community Schools Model at Work

By Joseph D. Fantigrossi, EdD

The challenges faced by our school systems today are unprecedented in their scope and intensity. In many districts, schools have become the hub of the community, providing not only for the students' academic needs, but for their social, emotional, and physical needs as well. In order to find success in such a complex environment, it is critical to systematically access and utilize resources both within and outside the walls of our schools. Several districts in Wayne County, NY (including Lyons, Sodus, North Rose-Wolcott, and Clyde-Savannah), are doing so by following a community schools model.

Wayne County Community Schools, under the leadership of Jay Roscup, aims to "support the development of culturally responsive trauma-informed community schools that integrate school and community resources to provide evidenced-based and restorative practices organized by a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS)." This statement encompasses what we consider to be the major components of intervention on behalf of our young people:

1) Culturally responsive,
2) Trauma-informed,
3) Community resources,
4) Restorative practices, and
5) MTSS

In our experience, most districts are doing a wide variety of positive work with their students and families, often in isolation, not connected to a broader goal or organized for maximum effectiveness and efficiency. The community schools structure allows us to do so.

The Coalition for Community Schools (http://www.community-schools.org/) says: "Using public schools as hubs, community schools bring together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities." This is a movement away from schools acting alone and towards active partnerships with community entities. It includes practices as diverse as parent workgroups, therapy provided by outside agencies, oral care from local dentists, and support from neighborhood literacy organizations, often within the friendly confines of the school building itself.

Culturally responsive practices focus on equity, in all its forms. We have worked extensively with Dr. Bryant Marks from Morehouse College around the concept of implicit bias, which he defines as "varying degrees of stereotyping, prejudice and/or discrimination below conscious awareness in a manner that benefits oneself or one's group; it involves limited or distorted perceptions of others. It is everywhere and affects everyone. We are all biased." It is our goal to increase cultural competency, expand understanding of issues related to diversity and inclusion, and deliver professional growth opportunities for all members of our school community. We have been supported in this work by the Family and Community Engagement Program, under the umbrella of the New York State My Brother's Keeper initiative.

Creating trauma-informed and safe and supportive school environments has been our work of the last three years. Utilizing the research of Dr. Bruce Perry and Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, along with our collaboration with Leslie University and the Trauma and Learning Policy Institute, we have worked to spread awareness and implementation of trauma-sensitive practices across over 30 school districts and more than a dozen conferences. Moving the conversation from "what is wrong with that student?" to "what happened to that student?" has been a critical shift in the journey of empathy for educators. The ARC Framework, developed by Margaret E. Blaustein and Kristine M. Kinniburgh, in *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents*, provides us with three primary domains of intervention to organize this work. We consider a child successful when they have become proficient in attachment, regulation (self), and competency.

A key component of our model is community partnerships. Many of the school districts of Wayne County have cultivated relationships to meet the diverse needs of their students. This includes, but is not limited to, organizations that provide the following: Family, relationship, and substance abuse counseling, social work services, emergency housing, food pantries, physical and mental health supports, parent/adult education, mentoring, and many other services. Additionally, community members volunteer their services in our schools, providing a much-needed extra set of hands or a smiling face for our students and teachers.

Restorative practices represent our most recent work and integrate seamlessly with our work on cultural-relevancy, trauma-informed care, and MTSS. Dr. Tom Cavanagh of Restorative Justice Education (www.restorativejustice.com) has worked closely with us to implement a train-the-trainer model of restorative practices in our region. Dr. Cavanagh's mission is "to establish caring relationships through the implementation of a culture of care in schools, with the goal of helping ethnically diverse students to flourish." The focus of this work is on building a strong, vibrant community that repairs the harm caused when schoolwide expectations are not met. This represents an exchange of the traditional philosophies of punitive responses to misbehavior for a "whole-school, relational approach to building school climate and addressing student behavior that fosters belonging over exclusion, social engagement over control, and meaningful accountability over punishment." (The Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue)

While utilizing culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and restorative practices is critical to supporting our school community, we need to organize these practices to maximize their impact and avoid the pitfalls of working in silos. MTSS drives this work in our school districts. Under the guidance of the Midwest PBIS Center (www.midwestpbis.org), we have worked diligently to establish a three-tiered response to student need. Tier 1 represents our universal practices, or what all students receive every day. This includes clear expectations, physical and

emotional safety, engaging instruction, and being treated with dignity and respect. Our goal is for Tier 1 to be sufficient for 80 percent of our students. Tier 2 is for students who need some additional support to find success. This includes small group interventions, such as group counseling, math and reading labs, and group mentoring and tutoring. We estimate approximately 15 percent of our students will need this level of support. Tier 3 is for 5 percent of our students who need the most support. Often, individualized plans are created for them. These plans include our most intensive interventions, often utilizing resources from both the school and local community. With our finite resources, it is crucial we systematically approach intervention. In the tradition of PBIS, we combine data, systems, and practices to best meet the needs of each of our students.

Following the community schools philosophy has allowed us address the challenges of rural poverty in a proactive and thoughtful manner. By focusing on practices that are culturally relevant, trauma informed, and restorative, and leveraging community partnerships along the way, we have created a multitiered system of support in each district that systematically assists our young people in meeting high expectations. Although there will always be work to be done, it is evident the work of the last five years has had a significantly positive impact on the children of Wayne County and we are excited to continue evolving and improving our support of their needs.

JOSEPH D. FANTIGROSSI, EdD, is the PreK-12 intervention coordinator in the Lyons Central School District.

School Climate and Culture:

It's Not Just a Phase, It's an Investment

By Timothy P. Martin
and Bryan Miltenberg

In 2017, we wrote an article for *Vanguard* about school climate and culture titled "The Importance of Positive Climate and Culture in the Age of Mandates." At the time, the numerous unfunded mandates imposed upon school districts challenged the daily morale of our learning environments. The vast "newness" thrust upon schools forced school leaders to spread their resources thin, making it easy to shelve positive school climate initiatives at the very time they were most needed.

We began our reflective and proactive journey back in 2015. The mandates have since stabilized, but change and revision continued within our district. With new central administration, building administration, and curriculum leaders, we were vulnerable to morale uncertainty once again. Many of us have experienced the "out with the old, in with the new" phenomenon: as leadership changes, exiting leaders take their initiatives with them. Then, as new leaders get their footing, so do their new initiatives, adding to the cycle of proverbial newness.

In 2017, our middle school brought on a new external assistant principal to complement the veteran principal and we were determined more than ever to continue our work on school climate.

It is important to note, we continue to define school climate as the present or short-term attitude of the school (Gruenert, 2008). School climate is the "here and now," and can be easily influenced by real-time internal or external factors, whereas culture evolves over the longterm. Climate is an organization's attitude and culture is the organization's personality. Creating the positive climate and culture we seek is extremely difficult because "human motivations and needs are so complex" (Zakrzewski, 2013). We created a five-part process for enhancing climate and culture that we believe can be replicated across a wide range of schools and settings.

ACKNOWLEDGE

Islip Middle School has 640 students in grades 6-8, and while our overall enrollment is (like many Long Island schools) decreasing, our English language learner and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations are increasing. In addition, our student body is becoming increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse. As such, we face new and evolving challenges and have been forced to reexamine our practices to determine if they are working for all members of our community.

The first step in enhancing school climate and culture is determining who your stakeholders are, assessing what they already know about climate and culture, and teaching to fill in the gaps,

through both formal and informal exposure. People must have a clear understanding of both why school leaders are working to address climate and culture and what they can expect as a result.

Who and what to measure in a school environment is very complex and includes physical, social, and academic elements (Loukas, 2007). We identified three stakeholder groups – staff, families, and students – and gradually introduced the key concepts of climate and culture, beginning with staff and continuing with families the following year and students after that.

We began with the faculty because we had the greatest access to them for training, surveying, and analyzing. We also knew they'd be instrumental in facilitating the process with the other two groups. To increase awareness, we created a subcommittee that would become the sounding board for this initiative. For several months, we used faculty, department, and team meetings to provide background knowledge before we even considered distributing a survey. We needed to build comfort and confidence before we asked for feedback.

Next, we provided similar information and a consistent message to our families. We used PTA, BOE, and SDM meetings to create an awareness and understanding of school climate and culture. We believed that building family awareness first would lend greater value to student-parent conversations about climate and culture down the line.

Only after we had a high level of confidence that our staff and parents understood climate and culture did we move on to the students. Through advisory activities, we began to educate the students about climate and culture.

ASK

Many have said, never ask a question you don't want the answer to. However, to truly investigate school climate, you must do exactly that. Before we proceed, a word of caution: It is very likely you will reveal feelings from stakeholders that don't align with your perceptions. If you are not ready to share and address the responses, even those that may be negative, then

you may not be ready to embark on this endeavor.

Each time we got ready to survey, we asked ourselves, Do we really want to do this? We knew we'd open ourselves up to criticism, but we also knew that in order to truly improve our outcomes, we had to get honest, valid feedback about what was working and what wasn't.

Although we drew inspiration from the climate and culture surveys currently available from notable organizations such as National School Climate Center, Nassau BOCES, and YouthTruth, ultimately we created surveys for each group that met our own specific needs. Selecting the appropriate survey for your community is a decision that should come from within. The faculty subcommittee affords an excellent opportunity to explore the instruments your school will distribute.

We considered some extremely in-depth and thought-provoking surveys. However, we eventually decided on shorter surveys in order to ensure higher completion percentages and a greater level of depth. While each survey was tailored to the specific group, we also posed some questions similarly to all three groups to enable cross-group comparisons. This proved critical. Our surveys used a Likert scale and contained, respectively, 12 questions (families), 16 questions (students), and 30 questions (staff). We also added a general open-response question to the end of the surveys.

Our first staff survey was administered at a faculty meeting in January 2016 through a Scantron, and the second administered online via Microsoft Forms in February 2019.

Our first parent survey was administered in fall 2017 and the second in winter 2019, both online via Microsoft Forms with an average response time of six minutes. Both were sent out to parents through a variety of channels, including Twitter, Facebook, school eBoard, and email.

Our student survey was drafted at a faculty meeting and finalized by our climate and culture committee. Since we are not a 1:1 district, we chose to administer a hard-copy survey through an Apperson form. Surveys

were administered during our 20-minute advisory period in spring 2018, fall 2018, and winter 2019.

ANALYZE

Engaging the staff in the analysis of the data is important (Wagner, 2006). Our subcommittee of volunteers from the faculty assisted the building leaders in the evaluation of data. This committee helped prioritize the steps to take for improving the building's culture.

Each time we analyzed survey data, we grouped our findings into categories, enabling us to deepen our focus. We grouped staff responses into three groups: climate, personal, and interpersonal. The parent surveys were divvied into communication, access, and involvement, while the student categories included empathy/acceptance and leadership/voice. In each case, the open-ended responses were coded and tagged to determine most common responses.

ACT

Armed with the knowledge of our stakeholders' needs, we acted responsively both to build on existing strengths and address shortcomings.

For our families, we switched from voicemail to text and email as our primary communication system and digitized our newsletter to be fully translatable and easily shareable with students' family members who could not access the mailed paper newsletter for a variety of reasons. We collaborated with district coordinators to create a new parent handbook to address parents' concerns about lack of curricular transparency.

For our students, we worked with our climate and culture committee to take action in both focus areas. We changed our December advisory theme to focus on building empathy and began a Pay It Forward kindness initiative that would continue throughout the year. To build student leadership and voice, we created a Buccaneer Student Roundtable that brought together diverse student voices to help our committee better understand student needs. In response, we've begun to revamp our dining room policies and are working to expand responsibility and privileges for eighth graders.

For our staff, we redesigned aspects of our schedule in order to allow for intradepartmental meeting time during the day that was not available before. We've also partnered with our teachers' union to host monthly morning breakfasts in order to build collegial relationships.

ASSESS

Climate and culture is not a one-year or two-year initiative; it's a permanent commitment to prioritize the social and emotional well-being of all the people in the school community. As we go forward, we continue to assess and reassess both our stakeholder needs, which are ever changing, and the effectiveness of the programs and interventions we put in place. We track changes in survey responses to determine what to keep or change, and we also collect data informally through ongoing conversations with our student leaders, parent groups, central administration, board of education, committee members, and union leadership.

CONCLUSION

School climate and culture is a term being used more frequently in education. However, just using the phrase does little, if anything, to create a positive school environment. Investing in a long-term process for evaluating school climate and culture can result in the outcomes we all seek: faculty who enjoy coming to work, parents who feel comfortable sending children to school, and students who want to go to class.

Samples of the surveys that were deployed to faculty, parents, and students of Islip Middle School are available online at saanys.org.

Vanguard Extras
https://bit.ly/1NYp7Ni

The surveys were based on best practices and information Islip Middle School was seeking to explore and should not be considered peer reviewed. However the information retrieved has been a catalyst to extensive conversations and action plans.

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BRYAN MILTENBERG is the assistant principal at Islip Middle School.

Reflections of a School-Based Behavior Specialist

By Erin McMahon

Most educators who have been in the field for over ten years or more will tell you that kids are coming to school with more needs than ever. Teachers, support staff, administrators, and entire school communities are supporting students with a myriad of needs and helping them overcome obstacles. In the Hudson Falls Central School District, we realized that we had to broaden the scope of our talented team of professionals in special education and counseling to include more for our students and teacher teams. One idea that began as an experiment on our part was that of adding a behavior specialist to our team.

Although the field of behavior analysis relies heavily on evidence-based practice, peer-reviewed research, data-based decision making, and a strict ethical compliance code, relationships are the defining factor of applied work. When working in home or clinical settings this is also true, but the number of different viewpoints and disciplines that exist within a school district make it a wonderful setting for collaboration in the best interests of students and families.

ERIN'S STORY: FROM MOM TO ADVOCATE TO COLLEAGUE

Becoming a behavior specialist in a school district happened because of a series of interactions over several years. In the fall of 2016, I found myself at a CSE meeting for a first-grade student who had made great strides academically with the use of discrete trial training (DTT) in preschool and kindergarten. While I was confident in the effectiveness of this teaching method and the child's ability to make progress, this CSE meeting was different. I was attending not as a board-certified behavior analyst, but as a mother.

Being a behavior analyst was not a childhood dream of mine, but a field I entered due to a passion and necessity after an early adulthood spent in the corporate world. There was little passion for me in my previous work. When my child was determined to qualify for preschool special education services, the research my husband and I found and recommendations given to us from several experts steered us in the direction of applied behavior analysis. As I watched my child thrive with the addition of ABA (as well as speech and occupational therapy, delivered using ABA methods), I was compelled to do more. After meeting with the DTT (discrete trial training) provider at the preschool, I incorporated more of their methods into our life at home. The progress continued and less than a year later I enrolled in graduate school to study applied behavior analysis. After graduating with a master's degree and gaining supervised experience

both at preschool and public school settings, I passed the board exam and then gained state licensure.

On that fall day in my child's CSE meeting, the district was challenging why this programming needed to be continued. My child was doing well and they wondered if it was really necessary. Instead of the CSE chairperson we had previously met with, this meeting was chaired by a new addition to the district. There was now a director of pupil personnel services (who is now the assistant superintendent). I knew we had been moved to the "hard to deal with parent" list now! As a mother, I feared the worst when the director of PPS called me before the meeting. It was about 6:00 pm on a Friday evening – why was she even working? She was nice and sounded like she really wanted to help us resolve the matter, but I thought there had to be an ulterior motive. I accepted her invitation to meet. In this meeting, I felt valued and like a member of the committee. It genuinely seemed like the best interest of my child was at the forefront of everyone's minds. Without rehashing too many details, the matter was solved and everyone walked away happy. The discretes continued under the guidance of an amazing and experienced special education teacher and were incredibly successful. We did not have to meet again until it was time for the annual review.

Only a month later, I was working for a local nonprofit providing in-home behavior support for children with developmental disabilities through a grant-funded program. One of the children I worked with was a resident of the same school district where my family lives. Once again, I found myself in contact with the di-

rector of pupil personnel services. She and I worked together with the child's family, related service providers, classroom teacher and support staff, and transportation department. There were several meetings, daily communication, and countless tweaks to the original plan but ultimately we were able to make this child's school experience as fulfilling as possible. It was incredibly challenging and rewarding to be a part of this process.

Around this time the school district posted an opening for a behavior specialist, while zero districts in our immediate area employed BCBAs. The field has discussed the need for specially trained professionals as school districts utilize RTI/MTSS models in a fashion comparable to that of the public health model of care. After reflecting on my experiences so far with this school district, both as an outside service provider and as a parent, I submitted my application right away.

Following a thorough interview process I accepted a position with the same school district I had been prepared to do battle with only months before. My job is different every day, covering the district's five school buildings and working with students in general education, co-taught classes, and self-contained programs from kindergarten through graduation. Occasionally there are amazing successes; more often there is slow and steady progress.

The majority of students in our district live in poverty. Our percentage of students with disabilities is above average. With so many of our families struggling to survive, it can be difficult to meet the basic needs of our students and even more difficult to help them stay motivated through high school graduation. Each person I work with, from teacher's aides to administrators, does something to help remove the barriers to students' success and even the playing field for them. Our related service providers know that there are not always outside providers to take on the aspects of treatment that are not school related, and they strive to fill

those gaps as much as possible. Teachers are laminating picture cards at night and packing extra snacks in the morning. Administrators are setting up accounts with barber shops to pay for haircuts because they understand that a bad hair day can lead a student to keep their hood on even when told to remove it, which leads to referrals and suspensions and ultimately disengagement from school in general. School counselors are arranging Christmas presents for families with a parent recently incarcerated, and employees from all levels contribute. Social workers are keeping in touch with former students and often continuing to be a guiding voice in lives, stopping by a student's house to drop off a birthday cake. There is kindness, compassion, and empathy shown to our kids every single day.

Before working at a school district, I held some beliefs that might perpetuate others' negative views on behavior analysts – notably that as professionals we tend to be so focused on the evidence-based science that other factors are ignored. At times, BCBAs can be tough to work with on an interdisciplinary team. Behavior analysts can be arrogant, dismissive of medical issues, unrelatable, internally competitive, and stuck in their comfort zones (McCulloch, 2016). Working in a school district has taught me that strong science does not always mean best practice. Without the resources to put them into practice, the research-based interventions and the best written plans are completely useless to both our students and the staff tasked with implementation. In order to best serve our students and help them make progress, we all need

to work together and contribute our expertise and experience. The antecedents and consequences to an instance of a targeted behavior are extremely important to successful behavior change programs. However, meeting physical, communication, psychological, and basic needs like safety and clothing are arguably initially more important than FBAs and BIPs.

As our district continues to move in the direction of trauma-informed practice and mental health support, there is so much opportunity to use my training in a collaborative way. While the Hudson Falls Central School District focuses on academics as much as possible, our true purpose is improving the lives of the students we serve, and the path to fulfilling that purpose lies primarily in creating relationships. We have staff members who have become trainers in therapeutic crisis intervention in schools, and I have been lucky enough to be asked by our director of special education to give trainings on behavior management basics to all levels of staff, including transportation and classroom support staff.

We focus on inclusion and integration of students with disabilities, not only because the law requires it but also because it is best for all students. This initiative has not always been easy and there are times when we have to take giant steps backwards. Our director of special education and CSE chairperson often have to make difficult decisions in the best interest of students, and our building administrators are called into crises involving students who would not have had the chance to succeed in public schools just a few years ago. Remaining unified in the belief that all students deserve the chance to learn and socialize in their home school districts with the necessary supports in place is what keeps us working hard. As our director of special education has said many times, special education used to be a place.

As a professional and as a mother, I'm eternally grateful that this is no longer the case.

While I technically work for the special education department, I hope I am a resource for all staff, students, and their families. Like so many of my colleagues, my job does not just include writing reports and analyzing data. The best parts of my workdays are not spent in my office, but either in classrooms or one-on-one with students. Some of the stories we hear and the crises we witness are heartbreaking and impossible to leave at school. We call students' parents or family members in the evenings, on weekends, and during school vacations to check on them. We text colleagues to inquire about students we know are having a hard time, and pass ideas around to help whenever possible.

Just like special education is no longer a place, schools are no longer a place students go just to learn academic skills. The people in our school district are not only administrators, teachers, support staff, and service providers but the community and family where students are safe, embraced, and challenged. We have so much to improve on, but seeing the improvements and care given by members of this school community makes me incredibly thankful to be a part of this district.

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For more information about board-certified behavior analysts, visit https://www.bacb.com/bcba/.

Working together, CTE educators can transform students' futures by providing a platform to engage them in the pursuit of lifelong transferable skills.

ERIN MCMAHON is the PK-12 behavior specialist for Hudson Falls CSD. She is a board-certified behavior analyst, a licensed behavior analyst (New York), and most importantly a mom.

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TUESDAY, JULY 30

TRANSFORMING LEARNING AND TEACHING WITH MOBILE TECHNOLOGY
PAUL VASSAK AND LEAH CONAUGHEY, APPLE

Apple instructors will start where they left off last year in the popular workshop that got educators actively engaged in ways to transform learning through digital integration. This year's workshop will feature engaging and interactive learning around specific actions to promote innovation with the pedagogy to match the technology.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 31

FROM "YES, BUT..." TO "WHAT IF?" DEVELOPING A CLIMATE FOR CREATIVITY
DUANE WILSON AND BETH SLAZAK,
CREATIVE EDUCATION FOUNDATION

This workshop will provide attendees with the tools and skills associated with creative thinking and creative problem solving to bring back and share with staff and students in the fall. The barriers (and there are many!) to creative thinking will be aired and addressed, with the goal of fostering positive beliefs and actions that lead to new and innovative responses and solutions.

What Is Missing from Our
Social Emotional Learning Plan?
Systems Thinking!

By Carin L. Reeve

In the past two decades, schools have become increasingly aware of the need to support students' social and emotional development. There are programs to purchase, videos to watch, songs to sing, and character traits to read about, but concerns about classroom behavior and children lacking problem-solving skills are prevalent. For school leaders and classroom teachers, the need to support both social and emotional learning and high academic standards is real – but how to do both, and do them both well, is a continual challenge.

A strong foundation in social and emotional learning does more than just make a difference in academic growth and achievement; it actually gives children the kinds of skills they will need to be successful in school and in life. Research supports that "effective mastery of social-emotional competencies is associated with greater well-being and better school performance whereas the failure to achieve competence in these areas can lead to a variety of personal, social, and academic difficulties" (Durlak, et al., 2011).

Building a school culture deeply rooted in social and emotional skills requires leadership with a clear vision, a systems-based approach, and regular opportunities for practice and feedback.

WHY DO WE NEED A FOUNDATION IN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING?

The process of education has changed very little in the past decades; however, the expected outcomes for education have changed dramatically. In a recently published white paper, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) looked to the year 2030 – when children who started school in 2018 will be graduating – to make policy and practice recommendations for the way we educate around the globe. OECD identified that today's children will inherit unprecedented environmental, economic, and social concerns as adults (OECD, 2018). Tomorrow's adults will need to think, learn, and work differently in order to solve these complex and interconnected problems. We can no longer prepare children to inherit these future problems with the instructional practices of the past.

Today's children are more connected through technology, yet less connected in terms of social, interpersonal, and collaborative skills. Developing the nuances of communication, empathy, or active listening is nearly impossible through text or other forms of online communication (http://newyorkbehavioralhealth.com/the-impact-of-social-media-use-on-social-skills). Additionally, today's children are bearing the weight of trauma, neglect, violence,

and abuse at alarming rates; according to www.recognizetrauma.com, 26 percent of children have experienced significant trauma before the age of four and 60 percent of today's adults have experienced a trauma during their formative years (http://www.recognizetrauma.org/statistics.php).

The evidence clearly supports the extent of the need for social and emotional learning. So, what do schools need to do to ensure that today's children get the skills that they will need to succeed in tomorrow's world?

BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION IN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS REQUIRES SYSTEMS

When there is something as critical as our children's future at stake, the phrase "hope is not a strategy" (Page, 2003) takes on new meaning. Ensuring that students have the social and emotional skills that they will need requires a systems thinking approach.

Systems are the interconnected structures that allow for ongoing growth and discovery. Systems thinking is proactive; it looks at a problem from impact to outcome in order to build a connected, planned, and thorough response that is clear to all stakeholders. Systems thinking uses progress monitoring and feedback to make adjustments that will ensure better outcomes. In this way, systems can learn to become more efficient and effective.

1. **Identify the need based on data.** Finding the right solution requires data to identify the actual problem. Without informing our understanding with data, we run the risk of responding to our own perception of the problem. Data provides the who, what, when, where, and how this problem is playing out.
2. **Create a clear vision.** A systems thinking approach to social and emotional learning needs a clear vision of the expected outcomes. Too often in schools, we spend our time and our resources implementing programs that we have not really planned for, and it is that lack of planning that

leads to failed implementation. In our work with schools, we regularly hear feedback about how much time and effort were spent in bringing in a program or an assembly, and then a few weeks later the school staff is noticing that everyone is back to their old patterns of behavior. Having a clear vision requires that everything connects to that vision and supports the expected outcomes.
3. **Develop a common language and message it consistently.** One of the key steps in planning lies in developing common language for expectations and messaging those expectations. When we articulate a vision for social and emotional learning, we take the time to identify what it will look like, feel like, and sound like in our school for students and adults. Common expectations should be evident throughout the school in what students and adults say and do. Clear, consistent expectations must be owned by everyone or they will not become a cultural norm.
4. **Model, teach, practice, and reinforce.** Building any new skill set takes practice, for adults and students. Opportunities to practice must be provided regularly if we expect skills to be applied to more complex situations as children develop. Schoolwide systems must build in opportunities to model, teach, practice, and reinforce in more complex situations if these new skills are going to become fully embedded in the culture of the school. Anytime we hear ourselves say, "Our kids can't…," we must remind ourselves that it is an opportunity to model, teach, practice, and reinforce new skills.
5. **Monitor progress and provide intervention.** Systems allow schools to move along a continuum of implementation – moving forward or backward based on the needs of the building, the classroom, or the individual student. Monitoring the progress of implementation

with data helps to identify areas for potential intervention or adjustment of the plan. This progress monitoring will inform the effectiveness of the system already in place and identify gaps that must be filled. This is not a failure; rather it is an opportunity for additional growth!

IN CONCLUSION

When we begin to think about systems for social and emotional learning in schools, we need to understand why we are addressing this need. Today's children are coming to school with greater needs for social and emotional support and lagging skills in communication, emotional regulation, and executive functioning. As a result, schools must embrace their role in helping children develop and master social and emotional skills so that they can successfully navigate the complexities they will face in the future.

Building systems to support social and emotional learning in schools is different from implementing a program or doing an activity because it is a proactive plan that is developed in response to identified needs. Over time, these systems can change the culture of a school as the common language becomes the norm for all adults and children. Systems allow opportunities for skills to be modeled, explicitly taught, practiced, and reinforced, and additional data informs the skills that need additional support or intervention.

When we consider the responsibility that we have as educators to prepare today's children for the future that they will inherit, we know that we must provide children with the opportunities they need to master social and emotional skills within the context of collaboration, independence, and caring relationships. School leaders who can see the opportunity for children to grow and develop these skills throughout the continuum of K-12 education must create systems that can learn, grow, and be responsive to the needs of the children and adults that they serve. There is no time to wait. It's time to lead the change we know is needed.

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The Power of Content and Context to
Support Academic Social Emotional Learning

By Bruce H. Crowder, EdD

The push to power social emotional learning (SEL) in our classrooms has finally gained traction for teaching the whole child. A National Research Council (NRC) report identified cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal competencies that contribute to successful experiences in school, the workplace, and life.

In addition, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) developed a framework with five core competencies:

- Self-awareness to recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values.
- Self-management to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations.
- Self-awareness to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures.
- Relationship skills to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups.
- Responsible decision making to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms.

Also, at the federal level the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) supports evidenced-based learning related to SEL. To top it off, many states drafted SEL benchmarks to support implementation. This is all great news!

Implementation of SEL may take on at least two forms: macro- and/or micro-level. With macro-implementation the entire system is to be adjusted, an effort that calls for committee work from the district level and in the schools. In all probability, it will entail professional development to ensure a common language and understanding of SEL and how it works within a school and community culture. This is a big-picture approach that takes time, commitment, and resources. However, SEL cannot and must not be an "add-on" imperative. It must support academic achievement as an integral part of an educational system to not only survive but thrive.

A MICRO-LEVEL ASEL APPROACH

Therefore, the intent of this article is to settle on a micro-approach and examine how SEL may thrive as it works its way into a school system, beginning with the curriculum. It all sits squarely on the acronym ASEL, which stands for academic, social, and emotional learning. ASEL conveys a different message than SEL as a stand-alone, which signals a single program approach. Teachers' plates are full and one more item to digest could contribute to gastric nightmares. Also, the SEL fit within a curriculum should be implemented without the need for whole-scale disruption to the system. It should be developmental, flexible, and expansive by empowering teachers to build SEL competencies and skills into classroom instruction that makes sense in various supportive contexts.

Nonetheless, it would be prudent for a learning community to acquire an understanding of SEL as it embraces it as a part of its vision, mission, and core beliefs. This is where NYS SEL benchmarks are helpful in guiding implementation at each level of learning in much the same way Next Generation State Learning Standards are doing. The fit between SEL and academics should be natural because a forced fit will be awkward and not genuine. This is not a one-size-fits-all approach; rather, teachers will acquire new and exciting ways to embed SEL competencies and skills into classroom instruction through regular practice

within their units of study. In fact, many teachers will acknowledge how much of what they already do with their students addresses elements of SEL. However, what we know about educational change tells us that working a new dimension into an existing system will take time. Once in place, there is the challenge of sustainability.

To assist administrators and teachers, it would be insightful to explore an approach to teaching and learning in an ASEL environment. And, it begins with an understanding of the power of content and context to support it. From this researcher's perspective, the success of ASEL is tied to the selection of content and use of context to power it. For a teacher of reading across content areas who knows the importance of content and context, the following adage prevails: content and context determine process.

Content for learning may encompass a myriad number of items, which vary from a story to a discovery, an event in real time, or historical matter. The selection of content serves the process that the teacher chooses to use to meet specific learning objectives and standards. Context, on the other hand, is essential if meaningful learning is to result. Learning should be related to the students' context, their lives and experience, whenever possible. This is because cognitive psychology clearly supports the notion that there is no such thing as "new" knowledge. To acquire new knowledge, the brain must place this knowledge in the context of what it already knows for it to be meaningful.

AN **ASEL UNIT FRAMEWORK**

The illustration below represents an ASEL instructional unit design based on a fable to teach a moral. The fable was selected because it would support why self-control is an important attribute. Learning standards and SEL benchmarks serve as the basis for what students would know and do in this instructional unit. While the illustration is purposely simplified, it does provide an example of what an instructional unit construct might look like.

The ASEL unit illustrated below is based on the work of Ralph Singh, who is the CEO of Wisdom Thinkers and who consults with schools to develop curricula and resources to create a school climate of character. His "Stories to Light Our Way: Journey to the World of Good" have proved effective in reaching all students. These stories come from the world's traditions and cultures and may be embedded within a current curriculum to support ASEL.

BROADENING **CONTENT AND CONTEXT**

The possible content and contexts to support ASEL at all grade levels are virtually endless. Start by examining current curriculum to see where there may be a natural alignment of SEL benchmarks with topics being studied and adjust student performances to include SEL competencies and skills. Across all academic disciplines there resides the possibility for expansive implementation of ASEL, such as:

Art: its purpose, lives of artists, techniques, symbols, periods, cultural contributions, etc.
English language arts: fables, folktales, myths, legends, speeches, novels, film, etc.
Math: mathematicians/ Pythagoras, applications, devices/enigma, games, problems, etc.
Music: its purpose, musicians/ composers, great works, influences, cultural contributions, etc.
Science: scientists, theories, inventions, discoveries, applications, impacts, contributions, etc.
Social studies: historical figures, social issues/movements, events, decisions, inventions, etc.

The context for using any of the content above may range from music to cartoons to TV programs. Whatever the context used, it should relate to students' experiences to enhance understanding.

Next Generation State Learning Standards
4R1: Explain what a text says.
4R2: Determine a theme.
4R3: Describe a character.
4R4: Determine the meaning of phrases.
4R5: Analyze characters.
4R6: Compare the point of view.
4R7: Explain information presented visually.
4W2: Write to explore a topic.
4W3: Write narratives.
4SL1: Engage in collaborative discussions.
4SL4: Recount an experience.

Essential Question:
What do I need to know about myself and others?

Concepts:
Control, Conflict, and Consequences

Theme:
Listen to the wisdom of others.
Content: Story about self-control
Context: Artwork depicting characters

Guiding Questions:
- What is the setting?
- What is the meaning of stuck in the mud?
- Why do characters behave the way they do?
- What is the situation? Conflict?
- Why the consequences?
- What is the moral? How might it affect me?

Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks
1A.2a. Describe a range of emotions/causes.
1B.2a. Describe personal strengths/skills.
1C.2a. Describe the steps: goal achievement.
2D.2a. Describe causes and consequences.
3C.2a. Identify and perform roles.

Student Unit Performances
1. Present essential question for discussion and understanding.
2. Review guiding questions through class discussion.
3. Listen to fable for content understanding.
4. Write key words needing definitions/meanings.
5. View/interpret orally in teams pictures in text.
6. Present possible themes and orally support them.
7. Infer emotions associated with themes with details.
8. Analyze main character's emotions and consequences in teams.
9. Role play emotions from personal experiences/class discussions.
10. Complete a student behavior rating scale.
11. Complete standards-based assessment with *SRs and ER items.
12. Analyze assessment results with students.
*SR=Short Response and ER=Extended Response Items

MEASURING SEL

ASEL unit performance item 10 on the previous page refers to a student behavior rating scale of which there are a number available. The student behavior scale is an SEL measurement tool that should be used at strategic times during the school year to gauge a student's SEL growth based on awareness of one's personal behavior. An SEL measure may be run in a pre- and post- fashion or implemented at specific times over a school year. This measuring tool would be based on selected SEL competencies or a specific competency. Statements related to each competency are listed as options in the scale that may, in some way, relate to the student who is completing the measure. An example of a self-control scale is portrayed below:

Not only students but also students' teachers and possibly parents would complete a behavior scale. The SEL measurement is a way for students to reflect on their behavior to identify where a behavior change is warranted, as well as to make their teachers and parents aware of their status. Also, the scale may be used to create student profiles for progress monitoring and inform prevention or intervention strategies. To facilitate the measurement aspect of SEL, technology would relieve the burden of data analysis and reporting.

Change is a mystical thing. There is no formula that enables it to run smoothly toward desired goals. Educational environments are unique because staff and students are. If the intent is to teach the whole student and educators realize the importance of such a goal, many and varied approaches will ultimately result. This will be good. Sometimes change must happen in small increments that lead to aggregated results. This micro-approach may serve to aid in a successful implementation of ASEL.

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Self-Control: Item	Responses				
• I can wait in line patiently.	Almost never ○	Once in a while ○	Sometimes ○	Frequently ○	Almost always ○
• I sit still when I'm supposed to.	Almost never ○	Once in a while ○	Sometimes ○	Frequently ○	Almost always ○
• I listen attentively.	Almost never ○	Once in a while ○	Sometimes ○	Frequently ○	Almost always ○
• I know when to speak.	Almost never ○	Once in a while ○	Sometimes ○	Frequently ○	Almost always ○

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Reading Practice and the
Social Emotional Connection

By Jan Bryan, EdD

"I think I can." The classic *Little Engine That Could* by Watty Piper, first published in 1930, is widely known and loved for its engaging story about believing in yourself and trying your best.

Even today, these four words immediately call to mind the beloved favorite. Yet, that little engine who thought it could (and therefore did) has given way to a new millennium and a wider path for books and stories addressing K-12 social, emotional, and behavioral wellness.

Today's school libraries and digital reading platforms are teeming with books that focus on issues related to key aspects of social emotional learning. Kindergarten teachers are reading aloud books about being helpful and kind. Librarians and media specialists are recommending books about courage and caring, friendship, and sharing. They're turning valuable – and necessary – reading practice time into lessons learned about showing empathy, overcoming obstacles, or dealing with grief and conflict.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social emotional learning as the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. These skills are equally important to students' success in academics, career, and life. Educators are addressing key issues, bringing social emotional learning to students of all ages through reading practice in classrooms, homes, and community centers across the United States.

Here are a few tips for engaging students in books that help build social emotional skills.

IDENTIFY YOUR SOCIAL EMOTIONAL GOALS FOR STUDENTS.

Perhaps you want to focus students on setting goals and maintaining a growth mindset while they work to achieve those goals. Maybe you want to give students a sense of belonging or teach them to work as part of a team. Decide which social, emotional, and behavioral issues you want to address and seek out titles that address these competencies.

ALLOW FOR AUTONOMY AND ACCESS TO AN ABUNDANCE OF BOOKS.

Student choice and access motivates readers at every level. Provide access to a variety of books that offer social, emotional, or behavioral lessons while adding to the valuable reading practice time students need to grow.

SELECT TEXTS THAT REPRESENT CULTURAL DIVERSITY.

Give your students a wide range of reading options so that more children see themselves in the stories they read.

Although it's a challenge to effectively integrate social and emotional competencies into the curriculum, children's book authors are making it easier with age-appropriate books that make connections to social emotional learning. And students are self-selecting books with social emotional connections as well. This is evident from the Renaissance data on books that students read most, based on reading records of 8.6 million U.S. students in grades K-12 who read 289 million books throughout the 2017–2018 school year.

What Kids Are Reading, an annual report published by Renaissance for the past 11 years, lists the most-read books in every grade. Along with the traditional book lists by grade, the 2019 report highlights cross-curricular lists of books, including books that connect reading practice to social emotional learning. Here is a sample of those findings.

STUDENTS IN GRADES K–2 LEARN TO HELP OTHERS.

In reviewing the What Kids Are Reading data, researchers noted that students in the early grades often read, or have read to them, titles that focus on the importance of helping others. Among the most popular titles in this grade band were *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein, the *Biscuit* series by Alyssa Satin Capucilli (which includes *Biscuit Finds a Friend*), and the *Clifford* series by Norman Bridwell (which includes *Clifford's Good Deeds*). Other age-appropriate titles on this topic include *The Lunch Box Surprise* by Grace Maccarone, *Just Critters Who Care* by Mercer Mayer, *If the Dinosaurs Came Back* by Bernard Most, *Room on the Broom* by Julia Donaldson, and *I Can Help!* by Hans Wilhelm.

BULLYING IS A COMMON THEME FOR GRADES 3-5.

For students in grades 3-5, the researchers found that one of the students' favorite series was one that also addresses a critical social emotional learning topic: bullying. *The Wonder* series by R.J. Palacio – about a child bullied for his appearance – is ranked among students' top reads, and even earned the number one spot for fifth-graders. Students in this grade band can also learn lessons in social behavior by reading books such as *The Bully from the Black Lagoon* by Mike Thaler, *Save Me a Seat* by Sarah Weeks, *Yoon and the Jade Bracelet* by Helen

Recorvits, *ReStart* by Gordon Korman, and *Fuzzy Mud* by Louis Sachar.

STUDENTS IN GRADES 6-8 **GET HELP DEALING WITH GRIEF.**

In the 6-8 grade band, students' reading often touches on topics that may trigger negative emotions, such as the Holocaust (*Night* by Elie Wiesel), terrorism (*I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai), and child abuse (*A Child Called "It"* by Dave Pelzer). On the social emotional learning side, there are plenty of books that can help them learn to deal with various forms of grief and sadness. Suggested titles include *Last Man Out* by Mike Lupica, *Wonderstruck* by Brian Selznick, *The Thing About Jellyfish* by Ali Benjamin, *Lost in the Sun* by Lisa Graff, *Love & Gelato* by Jenna Evans Welch, *Tell Me Three Things* by Julie Buxbaum, and *Slob* by Ellen Potter.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IS A POPULAR HIGH SCHOOL TOPIC.

Students in grade 9-12 often read literary classics that focus on tense – and sometimes violent – conflicts between characters, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, and *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. To help students learn to address conflict and resolution in their own lives, educators also may want to steer them toward titles such as *Bottled Up* by Jaye Murray, *Adrift* by Paul Griffin, *Among the Brave* by Margaret Peterson Haddix, *Breathing Underwater* by Alex Flinn, *Hidden Talents* by David Lubar, and *Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher.

As we look to engage students in books that promote social, emotional, and behavioral wellness, we can't underestimate the importance of any reading practice to help students of all ability levels move forward in reading achievement while strengthening social emotional skills. Reading fiction improves your ability to walk in another's shoes and flex your imagination (Bergland, 2014). Reading triggers students' brains to respond as if they are engaged in actual physical experiences.

In a Carnegie Mellon study (Wehbe L., et al., 2014) researchers found that reading a chapter of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* lit up the same regions of the brain that would light up when watching a movie. As students read how he steers the broom, the sensory motor center of the brain is activated as if they are steering the broom! Reading reinforces the language of empathy, deepening the understanding of concepts presented.

Research also indicates that reading can build empathy and may play a role in developing resiliency. Is it any wonder that Daniel Willingham, psychology professor at the University of Virginia, insists students should not only read – but read a lot?

READ. READ A LOT.

When students read, and read a lot, their brains are quite busy acquiring vocabulary, which is critical to learning. Lev Vygotsky, the noted psychologist who focused intently on how children learn, went so far as to call words "functional toolkits for conceptual development." We truly know a concept when we have a word to use as its label.

We say "empathy," but must also understand all that it implies, such as "walking in another person's shoes" and "soothing a wounded soul." Reading gives students access to the fuller concept of empathy, so that they learn to recognize – and to speak – the language of empathy. The same is true for other social emotional competencies, such as resiliency and sustaining positive relationships. What's more, every minute spent reading makes a difference in students' achievement and growth.

- Over the course of their K–12 schooling, students who typically read 30 minutes or more each day learn nearly 14,000 more vocabulary words than those who read for less than 15 minutes a day.
- Students who read an average of 30 minutes or more each day make triple the percentile rank improvements of students who read less than 15 minutes per day.

Educators know the importance of daily reading practice. And it's so exciting that many are leading students to books that address key social, emotional, and behavioral issues. Can we enhance students' independent reading practice time with access to books that teach social emotional skills? Can we help all K–12 students build social emotional skills by engaging students in books and stories they'll love, even treasure, decades later like we continue to treasure *The Little Engine That Could*?

I think we can.

JAN BRYAN, EdD, is vice president and national education officer at Renaissance. She is a former classroom teacher and professor of reading and educational psychology. Jan writes and presents regularly on assessment, literacy development, and teacher expertise.

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