



Indicator: The school selects, implements, and evaluates evidenced-based programs that enhance social/ emotional competency. (5355)

Explanation: The evidence suggests that effective social/emotional programs should be school-wide and take place across multiple grade levels and school years. Programs should be selected based on a record of success, fit with the school population, and input from key stakeholders. It is important for school leaders to set the tone for implementation, setting high expectations, modeling the Social/Emotional Competency, and ensuring that adequate resources and training are continuously available. School teams must review data on an ongoing basis to ensure that implementation is creating positive outcomes for students and the school at large.

Questions: How will the school engage stakeholders and existing evidence to select the right program for the school community? What resources have been allocated to ensure effective implementation? What types of training opportunities will be available to staff prior to and throughout the year? How will the school teams evaluate data to continuously monitor implementation and outcomes?

What is the Social-Emotional Competency?

The Social-Emotional Competency fosters a level of concern and respect for oneself and others strengthening skills of self-management and productive decision-making (Carreker & Boulware-Gooden, 2015; Educator Competencies, 2015; Redding, 2016). Specifically, social-emotional learning (SEL) helps students use their “sense of self-worth, regard for others, and emotional understanding and management to set positive goals and make responsible decisions” (Carreker & Boulware-Gooden, 2015, p. 2). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2012) identifies five primary skills in the social-emotional domain:

- Self-awareness: Being able to identify and understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and abilities;
- Self-management: Being able to regulate these emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in the pursuit of positive and healthy goals;
- Social awareness: Being able to understand and relate to others, identify social supports and resources, and understand social norms for how to act;
- Relationship skills: Being able to communicate and work well with others and develop positive and meaningful relationships; and
- Responsible decision-making: Being able to make productive decisions about how to behave and interact with others, based on an understanding of norms, consequences, and others’ needs.

Weissberg and Cascarino (2013) write that, “SEL programming is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful” (p. 10). Yet many of these skills need to be explicitly taught to children and adolescents, especially as they pertain to the learning process. Teachers should not only instruct about these concepts but should also model and provide opportunities for their application throughout the school day, in the context of a safe environment for socializing and learning (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013; Carreker & Boulware-Gooden, 2015).

How Can Schools Ensure That They Are Using Effective, Evidence-Based Social/Emotional Programs?

In addition to defining the components of social and emotional learning, CASEL has also done extensive work in the evaluation and vetting of SEL programs, producing numerous guides for schools and districts to use in the planning, selection, implementation, and evaluation of SEL initiatives. CASEL establishes a number of baseline criteria that effective and evidence-based SEL programs have. Specifically, CASEL highly values programs with previously conducted, rigorous evaluations that utilize experimental methods and demonstrate positive outcomes for students (Safe and Sound, 2003; CASEL, 2013; CASEL, 2015).

Four particular components of program design, which have been summarized into the acronym SAFE, are characteristic of effective SEL programs. Optimal SEL programs are:

- (1) Sequenced—connected and coordinated activities to foster skills development;
- (2) Active—active forms of learning to help students master new skills;
- (3) Focused—containing a component that emphasizes developing social and emotional skills; and
- (4) Explicit—targeting specific social and emotional skills. (CASEL, 2015, p. 4)

Scope is also an important set of criteria for program quality. CASEL (2013, 2015) advises that for maximum effectiveness, schools and districts should select SEL programs that are designed for all students, addressing the entire school’s population. Not only should all students be reached, but SEL programming and instruction can and should take place across the span of activities at the school – from classroom instruction to after-school

programs to targeted programs for character education and violence prevention (CASEL, 2015). Additionally, it is ideal for selected programs to span more than one grade level, operate across multiple school years, and have nationally-available curricula. Finally, it is critical that the programs cover all five of CASEL’s social and emotional learning competency clusters, as described above (Safe and Sound, 2003; CASEL, 2015).

The research also stresses that selecting a program must involve consideration of the school’s context and stakeholders. When thinking about which program is an appropriate fit for the school, it is important to consider: the level of commitment and preparation at the school, the involvement of the staff and other stakeholders in the decision-making process, the programs that are already in place at the school, and the specific cultural and linguistic characteristics of the student population. It is recommended that school teams speak with other schools who are already implementing the programs they are looking to adopt to see if they would be a good fit for their own school on these indicators (Safe and Sound, 2003; CASEL, 2013; CASEL, 2015).

CASEL (2015) writes:

Adopting an evidence-based SEL program is not enough to ensure positive outcomes. The success of a program depends on high-quality implementation. Poor program implementation can undermine a program’s success and its impact on student outcomes. (p. 8)

Therefore, once a program has been selected, the school leader plays an important role in ensuring effective implementation. Leaders need to model the Social/Emotional Competency for both staff and students, holding all members of the school community to high standards in this area. Additionally, the school leader must ensure that appropriate resources are allocated for the adoption of the program and that ongoing training is available for staff throughout implementation (CASEL, 2013; CASEL, 2015).

Finally, it is encouraged that the school develop an implementation plan for multiple years to make sure that the program is adopted with fidelity and that quality is assessed over time (CASEL, 2013). Internal evaluation of progress is critical for successful student outcomes and should be conducted on an ongoing basis. School teams

should use “data on school climate, student social and emotional competence, and teachers’ implementation of evidence-based programs” with anecdotal reports to inform and continuously improve SEL practices at the school (CASEL, 2013, p. 12-13).

References and resources

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