

WHEATLAND-CHILI CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

What is social and emotional learning?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the way that children acquire and apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills 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.

Why is this important for schools?

There is a growing recognition that: 1) social and emotional health is important for life success; and 2) incorporating social and emotional learning K-12 education is an important strategy for promoting the development of social and emotional competencies. The movement to implement SEL and related frameworks in K-12 education has been around for at least two decades, but several contributing factors have brought SEL to the forefront in recent years.

First, we know that social and emotional competencies contribute to improved academic and personal outcomes. Children with early pro-social skills are more likely to graduate from high school on time, complete a college degree, and get and keep full-time employment. It is also clear that social and emotional competencies and 21st century skills are important to career attainment and success. Finally, there is a growing concern about the needs of students, particularly those who are experiencing trauma or adverse childhood experiences and who need additional support to be successful.

What is happening in the District to develop social and emotional learning?

As part of the District's Plan for Growth and Improvement relating to our Middle States Accreditation, we are focusing on student social and emotional health. The outcome of this work will be the use of an assessment tool to collect baseline data on pro-social skills, to identify a universal intervention for students, and Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports for struggling students.

We have seen an increase in the need for behavioral interventions at the elementary and secondary levels that goes beyond the universal level, where more involved interventions are needed to support children. Children who present with behavioral issues need our support in the same way as students who struggle academically. However, behavioral issues tend to involve other students in a way that is different from academic needs. To this end, the following has occurred:

Training:

- One-hour workshop (October) with all TJC staff on Therapeutic Crisis Intervention. Therapeutic Crisis Intervention provides strategies for preventing crises from occurring, de-escalating situations, and learning constructive ways for addressing stressful situations;
- Faculty meetings focused on consistent behavioral responses with students and trauma-sensitive strategies;

- Four-day training (November) occurred for social worker and special education teacher on Therapeutic Crisis Intervention;
- Full-day (Saturday) training on Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for cohort of six educators (classroom teachers, special education teachers, and psychologist) scheduled in January; and
- Ongoing training on Therapeutic Crisis Intervention will occur for additional cohorts of staff at the elementary and secondary levels.

Student Support:

- Design and utilization of universal classroom management strategies with all students;
- Creation of behavioral intervention plans and individual crisis management plans as needed for children when students do not respond to universal classroom management strategies;
- Arrangement of functional behavioral assessment and formal behavioral intervention plan for students when students do not respond to behavioral intervention plans;
- Facilitation of psychological assessments for evaluation of children for special education services where students are not responding to interventions;
- Facilitation of committees on special education (with required meeting participants) when needed for children to provide a higher level of support to regulate behavior and support academic growth where disability exists;
- Provide for access to social worker, psychologist, student behavioral assistant, and school counselor (secondary); and
- Arranged in October for additional student behavioral assistant staffing for TJC to begin when hiring is completed through Monroe 2-Orleans BOCES, noting that candidates are not readily available.

Planning and Exploration of Further Resources:

- Met (week of November 28) with representatives from the Children's Institute and the Greater Rochester Community Foundation to explore resources that may be available through these organizations, including instruments to collect baseline data on social emotional learning skills. Children's Institute is known as a center of excellence for the social and emotional health of children. Their staff includes psychologists, an economist, a pediatrician, and a number of educators, researchers, social workers, business professionals, and experts in public policy. The Children's Institute supports school districts and non-profits in this region on matters related to social emotional learning.

The Rochester Area Community Foundation works to improve the quality of life for people who live and work in the eight-county region through its leadership and strategic grantmaking. The Foundation is a source of fiscal support that may be available for work related to pro-social skill development.

- Met (week of November 28) with representatives from Council on Alcohol and Substance Abuse (CASA) to explore prevention support that is available through this group. Many districts in Livingston County utilize CASA counselors to provide pro-social skill development at the elementary level (through Second Steps) and at the middle level (through Life Skills Training). Both Second Steps and Life Skills Training are research-based programs identified through the *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning* as effective programs. The benefit of utilizing CASA is that support

could start quickly as teachers engage as partners with the outside counselor. Counselors are trained and provided by CASA, and one consistent individual would be assigned to work in the District at the elementary and secondary level. We are currently assessing this support.

- Met (week of December 5) with representatives from University of Rochester Medical Center's pediatric and adolescent mental health group to discuss support that may be available through this group. URMCM shared that they work with approximately 40,000 children and adolescents through their offices, and have been expanding their school-based work to focus on early prevention.

We will follow up with this group for further discussions as we determine how best to create a strong plan for supporting our students that will involve universal work in prevention, with resources for Tier 2 and Tier 3 services as needed.

- Wrote grant (week of December 5) to Rochester Area Community Foundation in collaboration with the Children's Institute entitled, *Planning for Systemic Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Health: Furthering a Wheatland Chili School District Key Priority for Student Success*, for funding in the amount of \$15,000.

Through the grant funds, the Children's Institute will assist us in developing a culture of understanding of the social and emotional learning work through focus groups and interactions with parents, staff, and students. Professional development on the need for social and emotional learning as a preventative, instructional focus will be addressed. Grant funds will enable teachers to have an opportunity to explore and select one of two research-based programs that are widely used at the elementary and middle levels to build pro-social skills in youth and learn how to gather to baseline data using an online teacher-child rating scale.

- Met (week of December 12) with Board member of Partners in Restorative Initiatives to learn about how we could use restorative practices in our student discipline issues. Training resources and support are available through the Partners in Restorative Initiatives.

Actions:

- Evaluate available resources (January) based on outcome of grant application to Rochester Area Community Fund and prepare plan for staff and student support to include:
 - Selection of social-emotional learning approach for implementation during the second semester;
 - Work with the University of Rochester Medical Center to design a pilot for classroom support of third and fourth graders, as well as behavioral health and case management consultation district-wide; and
 - Work with the Children's Institute to complete:
 - **Fact-finding interviews with key district staff:** Children's Institute will conduct interviews with four key district staff designed to learn more about district-level efforts related to and aligned with social emotional learning (SEL). In addition, the interviews will have a goal to better

understand the level of knowledge about and philosophical alignment with SEL as a district-wide strategy to support student success. These interviews will be conducted first to inform the remainder of the needs assessment activities;

- **Fact-finding interviews with principal, social workers, and student behavioral assistants:** Children's Institute staff will interview the principal, social worker, and behavioral assistants from each school for a total of seven interviews. These interviews will: 1) to uncover key challenges that need to be addressed; 2) to uncover all practices at the school level that might be considered part of an SEL effort; and 3) to determine knowledge of and support for SEL as a school-wide strategy;
- **Teacher Focus groups:** Children's Institute will conduct two focus groups, one with teachers at the elementary school and one with teachers at the high school. These focus groups will be designed to understand key challenges, practices that are currently in place, teacher perspectives on what should and can be done, and openness to SEL as a district-wide strategy;
- **Family and student focus groups:** Children's Institute will conduct one focus group with families of district elementary students and one with older students at the elementary level (grades four and five). The goal of the family focus groups will be to learn about family members' priorities for their children, their support or lack of support for SEL initiatives, their own needs and challenges related to the social and emotional health of their children, and their willingness to participate in home or family components of a comprehensive SEL initiative. The student focus group will be designed to uncover student priorities and concerns, goals, and suggestions for SEL practices.
- **Preliminary training and technical assistance:** Children's Institute will begin conducting preliminary training to lay the groundwork for social and emotional learning initiatives. Children's Institute will likely conduct training for faculty on the value of school- and district-wide SEL and school climate improvements as well as potentially on de-escalation techniques or SEL practices they can begin to use right away.

What can parents and community members do to assist?

Opportunities will be available for parent and community input into this important work. We will need to hear from you about concerns that you may have and suggestions for moving forward. Please consider participating in one of our upcoming focus groups. The dates and times for the meetings will be shared once scheduled.