

SEL in Action: Proven Solutions to Improve Student Mental Health

Creating a positive school environment

**A District Administration Web Seminar Digest
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Administrators who focus on social-emotional learning observe students performing better academically with improved behavior, creating an overall positive school environment. SEL also fosters self-confidence and well-being among children and teens and builds their resilience to stress.

In this web seminar, presenters discussed some best practices and strategies for integrating SEL programs and digital resources into everyday instruction to make a lasting impact on teen mental health and school safety.

Grace Gallagher: The Cameron K. Gallagher Foundation is an innovative and impactful organization working to revolutionize teen mental health. And we're able to do this through great partnerships with organizations like Gale, who truly understand the opportunity they have to seriously impact many who are completely lost in the world of mental health challenges. It is all our responsibility to step up and educate ourselves and to do what we can to help those who need it.

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for children ages 10 to 24. More teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza and chronic lung disease combined. The statistics aren't just numbers; each number represents a human being.

Knowledge is power. We offer programs, workshops and real-life practices to students, teachers and coaches. We offer speakers who share their experiences with mental illness and how they live a healthy lifestyle now. Many of our activity-based workshops focus on developing positive coping skills; building strong mind-body awareness; and allowing us to control our emotions, thoughts and actions, instead of them controlling us.

A goal for social-emotional learning is to create a harmonious classroom, but we must start with the individual to create the best balance and harmony within ourselves so that our students can focus, learn and positively contribute to their classrooms, schools and communities.

Shericka D. Smith: Our district has had several issues in which students who were hurting chose to express that in unhealthy ways—bullying, gun violence or, sadly, turning to suicide. These incidents sparked our superintendent to create the District Safety Advisory Council. The council made district recommendations, which helped our superintendent develop his 10-Point Safety Investment Plan.

This plan addresses school climate, social-emotional learning, planning and prevention, better communications, and overall physical and mental well-being for our students—not only to prevent a school shooting, but also to mitigate other risks that students are facing, such as bullying, self-harm, drug use and community violence.

One goal is to have 250 students for every mental health professional. We also plan to partner with an agency to help us provide comprehensive adolescent assessments. We are

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working with Social Sentinel, as well, to help us monitor social media posts.

Then, of course, for SEL education and training: Our district is using these funds to purchase a districtwide SEL curriculum, and we have narrowed down our list to three programs that we'll be using. In the meantime and in addition to these programs, we need support now, and we need it in a way that's best for students. So we purchased Gale eBooks focused around mental health. Students can access the eBooks at any time from a virtual library, and we can discover the most widely searched topics among students. Having this data helps us know what we need to focus on as a district.

Andrea Drouillard: As an extension of the library, Gale eBooks: Cameron's Collection contains 77 digital books for middle and high school students. It includes titles to help them with a multitude of issues that they may be dealing with: anxiety, depression, eating disorders, stress, changing family situations, attention deficit disorder, obsessive-compulsive

disorder, bullying, etc. The collection was just expanded this summer to include information about learning disabilities, leadership, hate and intolerance, breakups, jealousy, and disabilities. I also love the fact that Cameron's Collection includes books about mindfulness, meditation and happiness because having tools can help students manage stress.

Cameron's Camp for Wellness is for younger students. It includes e-books that focus on feelings, social skills, character education, family issues and more. We also have a more comprehensive collection: Safety in the Community, Home and School.

I definitely don't want to leave out educators. Support staff, teachers, counselors and administrators need access to information. From the school secretary to the guidance counselor to the principal to a special group of parents, other adults and I could have benefited from a collection like this when my daughter was battling cancer in high school. Every person in a school can touch our students' lives in positive ways. And that's why it's important to provide them with the tools they need to respond to difficult situations and help them with their own self-care.

To watch this web seminar in its entirety, please visit DAmag.me/ws082219