

Inclusionary Practices and Systems: **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

WHAT IS SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING?

Social emotional learning (SEL), refers to teaching and learning a wide range of personal and relational skills. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) breaks down SEL into 5 core areas. They are: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

- Self-Awareness - Identifying and expressing emotions and self-advocating for oneself.
- Self-Management - Executive functioning skills for organizing, prioritizing, setting goals and regulating.
- Social Awareness - Showing empathy and perspective taking skills.
- Relationship Skills - Interrelational skills to communicate, collaborate, and problem solve with others.
- Responsible Decision Making - Understanding the potential positive and negative outcomes of one's own behavior.



WHY IS SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING IMPORTANT? WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

- In order for children to grow into confident and competent adults, it is vital they develop their social and emotional skills.
- When schools address the 5 core areas of SEL as a whole school, all students learn core skills important for their self-esteem, ability to regulate, problem solve and successfully interact with others.
- Long term outcomes for students include improved self-esteem, interpersonal skills and academic achievement.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- SEL is equally important as academic outcomes.
- Provide for social and emotional learning across school-wide expectations, curriculum and community and family activities.
- Create more targeted interventions for students to receive more explicit instruction in the form of friendship peer groups, counselor services and school-wide PBIS.

CASE STUDY: HOOD CANAL PRESCHOOL

Hood Canal Preschool has fostered and exhibited a firm foundational belief of addressing the “whole child”. Having the passionate mission to achieve equity for all students served in their community, they began their SEL journey by identifying the needs of their students and families. Located in the Skokomish Native American reservation, Hood Canal School displayed a diverse scholastic demographic and a high attendance of low income families. To begin their work, Hood Canal wanted to reassure that each community member moved forward with the same lens and ensured that the goal was linear schoolwide. This would assist in addressing the challenges they were facing and guarantee students’ needs were being met with a collaborative, unified and inclusive lens.

The approach that Hood Canal took for Social Emotional Learning was not only applied to the classrooms but to their community. One of the areas that they wanted to target was the level of community engagement. In 2018, Hood Canal and their families collaborated and created the Community Caregivers Learning Circle. This is a family led inclusive initiative that allows caregivers the opportunity to converse on barriers, challenges, and resources amongst themselves. On a bi weekly basis, caregivers are offered childcare if needed to connect and create community partnerships of support and transparency independently without the interference of staff or administration. In addition, they converse over constructive literature provided by the iGrant to help support them in school and home environments.

On their journey of becoming more inclusive, Hood Canal began identifying the urgency to have the school community develop a more culturally responsive climate. To support this effort, the superintendent provided professional development centered around cultural responsiveness schoolwide. This created a bonded school climate where the mission and vision was clear and communicated and that strengths and differences of their community would be respected, heard, and celebrated.

Cathy Carlson at Hood Canal Preschool has a passion for addressing the whole child and providing them with the social skills, love, and support they need to become successful adults once they step in the world. With this goal in mind as well as the elimination of bullying, she firmly believes that social emotional learning is just as important as curriculum.

Her developing the whole child approach teaches students emotional independence as well as builds support, compassion, and different educational needs. One of her SEL approaches is Feeling Buddies. This tool exhibits different emotions which are utilized when they enter the classroom, through modeling scenarios, or at circle time activities. By incorporating Universal Design for Learning with Social Emotional Learning she provides students with opportunities to not only identify their own emotions but the emotions of their peers. This strategy provides students the opportunities to project their feelings in a positive and cooperative manner. This creates an emotional awareness and independent learning for their students as well as the entire classroom environment.

Literature that expresses different emotions are also unutilized in their environment. Books are carefully selected in English and Spanish that express emotions and examples of scenarios that students can relate to. During pre literacy times an emotion is covered and discussed. Once understood they discuss when they have felt that emotion at home or in school. Students are introduced to new feelings and emotions and how they can express them and address them. One thing Hood Canal is aware of is that all strategies will not assist all children. There is a lot of pivoting that takes place in the classroom to adjust to the needs of the students.

To support their ongoing inclusionary practices, Hood Canal provides students opportunities for emotional independence. One way that students are encouraged to be independent in their emotional learning is by utilizing tools and visuals they can access for emotional regulation, problem solving, and decision making. From calm down areas with visuals of different regulation strategies to a visual problem solving “Tool box”, students are given space to naturally express their emotions and learn empathy for themselves and those around them.

SEL supports all stakeholders in developing the social-emotional competencies necessary to create safe and supportive school, family, and community environments where both students and adults thrive, are respected and respectful, and where everyone engages in active learning, together.

Hood Canal Preschool has shown the importance of getting to know your students and families and applying that information to the classroom atmosphere. By incorporating the knowledge acquired from building relationships with the community to researching successfully inclusive climates outside of their district, Hood Canal has shown the importance of inclusion and the benefits of implementing inclusionary practices in their classroom in numerous ways.

RESOURCES

1. **Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning** <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>
2. **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)** <https://casel.org/>
3. **Simmons, D.** (2019). Why we can't afford white-washed social-emotional learning. *ASCD Education Update*, 61(4).
4. **Guide for Racial Justice and Abolitionist Social Emotional Learning** (Abolitionist Teaching Network, 2020)