

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AT ST. BRENDAN SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

Background

The mission of St. Brendan School is to provide our students with the highest quality Catholic education while teaching them to become active Christians, responsible citizens, life-long learners, effective communicators, and problem solvers. We recognize that students build social intelligence progressively through childhood, and that most children at various points in their childhood will be faced with social challenges that require adult help and teaching.

In September 2007, we entered into a partnership with *No Bully* to run an anti-bullying initiative. Over the course of 2007-2008, our school worked diligently to address student bullying. The initiative was informed by research that bullying behaviors are caused as much by the school culture as by the relational style that individual students bring to school. In partnership with *No Bully* we created a social vision for the type of community that our school seeks to be. We then created an anti-bullying policy so that everyone in our school is consistent and effective in responding to bullying. In parallel with this process, *No Bully* trained faculty, staff and parents in a series of workshops designed to give them the skills to coach students how to relate without bullying. In short, we laid a crucial foundation for a bully-free school community.

The remaining challenge for our school is to teach the social and emotional skills which our students most need. This challenge is heightened in the middle school years, as children become adolescents and transition from the primacy of vertical relationships with their parents to horizontal relationships with their peers. We realize we need to teach students the character strengths and relational skills that will replace aggressive, impulsive, or unempathetic behaviors that students, in general, typically employ. In the last two decades, the teaching of these character strengths, and the skills that underpin them, has come to be known as “Social and Emotional Learning” (SEL). SEL is the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations effectively.

Commencing in fall 2009, an action team of our administrators, teachers, and parents began reviewing, in partnership with *No Bully*, how we currently teach SEL concepts at our school. This team is also creating a plan to implement a grade by grade SEL curriculum¹. This document is our written plan.

¹ Members of the action team are Carol Grewal (Principal), Jan Donovan (Teacher/Vice-Principal), Ruth Nelson (Learning Support Teacher/Librarian), Tiffany Proehl (Technology Coordinator/Teacher), Ann Barbero (Parent), Judy Schrammel (Parent), Karen Seratti (Parent).

What is “Social and Emotional Learning”?

Howard Gardner, in his 1983 book *Frames of Mind*, suggested that intelligence is much wider and more various than that suggested by IQ tests. He elaborated his view of intelligence in his 1993 book *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*. According to Gardner, there are seven key varieties of intelligence. The first two are the staple academic intelligences that schools have traditionally tried to teach. Gardner identifies five additional forms of intelligence that in his view offer richer picture of a child’s intelligence and ultimately their potential for success. His complete list of intelligences comprises:

- Verbal intelligence
- Mathematical-logical intelligence
- Spatial intelligence
- Kinesthetic intelligence
- Musical intelligence
- Interpersonal intelligence
- Intrapyschic intelligence

Since 1983, psychologists have articulated Gardner’s two personal intelligences (interpersonal and intrapsychic) in greater depth. Notable amongst these is Peter Salovey, a Yale Psychologist, who was the first to come up with the name “emotional intelligence” that was later popularized by Daniel Goleman in his book *Emotional Intelligence*. In the last decade these two personal intelligences have together come to be referred to as “Social and Emotional Learning” or “SEL”.

SEL has become a unifying concept for organizing and coordinating school-based educational programs. The research and thinking that has gone into SEL offers a way of understanding the social and emotional dimensions of our school mission and gives valuable insight into how best to teach it.

WHY TEACH SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?

Rationale

Schools that implement social and emotional learning typically experience significant benefits in multiple areas of school life.

Social and Emotional Learning Reduces Student Negative Behavior

In December 2008, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (“CASEL”) published a meta-analysis of 317 research studies on kindergarten through eighth grade students that had participated in SEL initiatives². In all, some 324,303 student participants were involved, mostly from schools within the United States, making this the largest cumulative study of its

² Payton, J., Weissberg, R.P., Durlak, J.A., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., Schellinger, K.B., & Pachan, M. (2008). *The positive impact of social and emotional learning for kindergarten to eighth-grade students: Findings from three scientific reviews*. Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

kind. The questions that CASEL was attempting to answer in this meta-analysis were directed at the outcomes that SEL programs provide. CASEL's findings are quite remarkable. Participating schools saw a 44% decrease in suspensions, and a 27% decrease in other disciplinary actions. SEL programming reduces negative behaviors such as bullying by enhancing student attachment to school, and by giving children foundational skills to make healthy and ethical choices, resist negative social influences, and manage their feelings in productive ways.

Social and Emotional Learning and Academics

For many years, schools have focused on IQ and grade point averages, often to the exclusion of SEL. SEL was seen as something separate and superfluous. If academic learning was the meat and potatoes, SEL was the icing on the cake that only privileged schools could afford, or that lower socioeconomic schools were forced to provide because students were not learning these basic life skills at home. Many schools would skip the cake entirely. Because learning takes place within a social context, students need to develop both *academic* and SEL skills. These three domains are intrinsic to each other and reinforce each other. The CASEL report now proves what many educators have known intuitively. An average student enrolled in a social and emotional learning program ranks between eleven and seventeen percentage points higher on achievement tests than students who do not participate in such programs.

Social and Emotional Learning is Foundational to Life Success

IQ was for many years thought to be the most accurate predictor of success in the workplace. In truth, though, there is only a limited correlation between academic achievement in childhood and success in adult life. Daniel Goleman is seen as one of the leading advocates for the intelligences comprised in SEL (which he refers to as “emotional intelligence”). When Daniel Goleman correlated IQ test scores with how well people perform in their careers, he found that IQ accounts for between four and twenty-five percent of career success. Goleman found a much greater correlation between social and emotional competence and career success.

- In all jobs, in every field, emotional competence is twice as important as purely cognitive abilities.
- Social and emotional intelligence is increasingly important the higher up in an organization you go, especially in leadership positions. On average, close to 90% of the success of leaders in the workplace is attributable to their emotional intelligence.

This does not mean that we abandon teaching core academic subjects. These are important areas of culture in their own right and also remain threshold competencies for most jobs. But this data adds to the case for integrating SEL into the academic curriculum as preparation for adult life.

Social and Emotional Learning Changes School Culture

As schools integrate SEL, a higher order change takes place within the school culture. This occurs even when cultural change is not an intended goal. The experience of the schools that have integrated SEL is that they become more caring learning environments where students have increased motivation to learn.

The pathways to this change are multiple. One factor is the widespread SEL requirement that teachers create classroom environments based on inclusion of all and mutual respect. Another factor is that teachers start to absorb the lessons of what they are teaching into their own lives and use greater SEL in interacting with students. They become more adept at managing their own stress and emotions. This in turn allows them to attune more fully to the students in their charge and to track, mirror and validate what these students are feeling. Ultimately, teachers are able to acknowledge student feelings and needs, even in challenging situations where students are hostile or upset.

In demonstrating these behaviors, teachers become what *No Bully* refers to as social and emotional coaches. They are paying attention to the reality of their students' inner lives and helping students understand themselves. This is an essential childhood need. In meeting this need, teachers are demonstrating genuine caring for their students. And it reaps its own benefits. Student perception of teacher warmth, support and respect are significant predictors of student academic motivation.

IDENTIFYING THE BEST SEL CURRICULUM FOR OUR SCHOOL

The Key Social and Emotional Skills for Our Students

If St. Brendan School is to successfully help students develop socially and emotionally, it needs to articulate clearly the skills and behaviors that it seeks to foster. It is not enough to tell a student to be kind. Students need to know in practical terms what is expected of them and how to do it. Teachers in turn need to know what skills they should be teaching. In Fall 2009 we gave teachers a list of all SEL competencies and asked them to reflect on typical problem behaviors in their grade and what skill deficits these problem behaviors reflected. Their full assessment is listed in appendix three at the end of this report. These are the core skills that teachers see as essential to our students.

- Humility (as opposed to entitlement)
- Empathy for others
- Listening skills

Reviewing Curricula

Components of "Ideal SEL Curriculum"

We set ourselves the task of finding curriculum that teaches the skills which we have listed above as core. There are many classroom-based programs that are available to teach SEL. We know from evaluations of effective SEL programs that the ideal curriculum would:

- Be developmentally appropriate to each grade level
- Build skills systematically, grade by grade
- State clear student learning expectations by grade level
- Engage parents in supporting SEL

Components of Proposed St. Brendan School SEL Curriculum

Any proposed curriculum needs to align with our values and what we are already teaching. We know from past experience that our recommendations must address the following challenges if we are to meet the particular needs of St. Brendan School:

- Maintain a consistent message through all grades
- Utilize developmentally appropriate material for each grade level
- Continue to be current with learning theories and practices
- Involve and engage parents
- Plan for teacher turnover
- Perform annual review

Recommendations:

(1) Each grade level teacher from kindergarten to eighth grade runs a *Morning Meeting* for twenty to thirty minutes at the commencement of every week starting in the school year 2010-2011, with the encouragement to run a second *Morning Meeting* at the end of each week.

(2) Consider implementing *Second Step* in the school year 2012-2013.

Review of Potential Curricula

In choosing curricula, we looked at programs that had received a positive assessment from the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (“CASEL”). CASEL is one of the leading organizations worldwide in promoting the teaching of SEL. We reviewed a variety of programs and visited St. Nicholas Catholic School to see SEL in action. What follows is a brief synopsis of the programs we examined as the potential programs for St. Brendan School.

1. *The Morning Meeting Book* by Roxann Kriete describes a structured approach to creating a cohesive and caring classroom culture through a fifteen to thirty minute meeting at the start of the day. Each *Morning Meeting* contains these four components:

- a) Greeting
- b) Sharing
- c) Group activity
- d) News and announcements

Some schools continue this practice into the middle school grades under the name of “Circle of Power and Respect”. Schools that have established this practice in the lower grades find that students still value the opportunity to share in the middle school.

2. *Second Step* is a program created by The Committee for Children (see <http://www.cfchildren.org>). This program made it to the shortlist of programs given positive approval by CASEL. *Second Step* offers materials from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade. Depending on the grade, there are between 15 and 20 lessons for the whole year. *Second Step* focuses on three skill sets:

- a) Empathy training
- b) Impulse control and problem solving
- c) Anger management

The full scope and sequence of the program is contained at the end of this report. The program covers many of the skills that we are aiming to develop in students.

The *Second Step* brochure states:

“In about 30 minutes once or twice per week, elementary students learn to practice prosocial behavior. By understanding their emotions and how to respond to them, young students are able to remain focused on academics. The elementary kits contain child-friendly, poster-size photo-lesson cards and dynamic videos depicting children expressing emotions in real-life situations. Teachers follow the simple lesson outlined on the back of each card to help students connect their own emotional experiences to those they are seeing. Each lesson card includes the lesson objectives, a script, discussion, questions, role-plays or other activities, and suggestions for how teachers can model the skills taught in the lesson throughout the week.”

We liked the breadth of skills that *Second Step* teaches and how it reinforces our commitment to being bully-free.

3. *Heartsmaths* published by Heartmath. HeartSmarts teaches upper elementary students to manage stress, improve learning and strengthen relationships. HeartSmarts is organized into five modules. Short lessons within each module use experiential learning for problem-solving and collaborative discussion on topics related to school performance. Through minimal practice and reflection, students develop "habits of the heart," which improve learner readiness, motivation, behavior management and classroom climate.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

We appreciate that it is an ambitious project to implement SEL in every grade and that there may be some implementation challenges. We recommend that we pilot this program over a period of two years and thoroughly review our progress at the end of the each year.

The experience of most teachers *before they teach an SEL curriculum* is fear that this will be yet another drain on their time and that they do not have enough experience or support in this new area. The experience of most teachers *after they have taught SEL* is that this approach saves them time in the long run. Their students are more able to manage their feelings and to relate successfully without teacher help. In order to make this new curriculum a success, we consider it important that teachers are given as much support as possible in teaching SEL.

Process for the Initial Year (2010-2011)

1. Teacher Training

We need to provide regular training that supports teachers in building their capacity to implement the SEL program.

Integral to the learning process is providing our teachers with a variety of learning experiences, such as opportunities to:

- Collaborate with peers
- Access individualized coaching
- Observe others and exchange feedback
- Attend workshops or in-services utilizing a structured approach
- Reflect on the process with all stakeholders
- Celebrate achievements

2. Integrating SEL Curriculum into Existing Curriculum

SEL is not a standalone curriculum. When taught best, SEL becomes the way in which we approach everything that we do in our life. Ideally, teachers will reference SEL skills throughout the week in all subject areas.

3. Social and Emotional Coaching for Individual Students in Need

Another aspect of integration is providing additional help for students with particular challenges in learning social and emotional skills.

We think that all teachers and administrators would value having a resource list that they can give to parents who are open to finding additional help for their students. This list is included in the Appendix.

Additionally, we are considering hiring a school counselor who will coach students that have particular challenges in social and emotional skills. Many of the students who are referred to the office have deficits in social and emotional intelligence. Ideally our student support services will be familiar with the SEL taught in the classroom and use the same vocabulary to give these students in-depth coaching in what is already being taught.

4. Communicating our Expectations to Students

Students learn best when they are told what they are expected to achieve. One way to do this is to include an SEL component as part of our Good Citizenship Award.

5. Partnership with Parents

Schools often do not tell parents what SEL skills they seek to teach their children. This is a lost opportunity on many levels. Parents are increasingly vocal about wanting their children to learn SEL skills. If St. Brendan School were to present prospective parents with a copy of SEL standards that we seek to teach, grade by grade, that is a powerful and authentic incentive for parents to enroll their children at this school.

Secondly, it is a lost partnership opportunity. SEL is taught best in partnership between parents and school. If we inform parents what SEL skills their child will be taught, we can recommend parents reinforce these skills at home.

Recommendation:

Include the core SEL skills (listed above) to all stakeholders via the school website, handbook and newsletters.

6. Monitoring our Success in Implementing *Morning Meeting*

If we are to make *Morning Meeting* a success, we need to track its success and to troubleshoot the inevitable problems. We need to make the time to revisit this report and make changes to this in writing, in light of the feedback we receive.

Recommendation:

Utilize the following methods to evaluate the success of our SEL curriculum:

- Reflection circles during faculty meetings where teachers share their experiences, successes and challenges
- Individual meetings with the Principal
- Feedback from parents
- Recognition of student success via Good Citizenship Award and rubrics of Student Learning Expectations

7. Transferring Lessons of *Morning Meeting* to How Students Interact with the World

We need to address how we will help students transfer their SEL from the classroom to their wider lives. We need to think about giving our students the opportunity to be of service to others in the community. This is what Professor Nel Noddings means by practice: “If we want to produce people who will care for one another, then it makes sense to give students practice in caring and reflection on that practice.” There is a strong service component already integrated into the St. Brendan School curriculum that is reflective of the school’s mission. The SEL program will enhance this spirit of service and commitment to others.

8. Sustaining the Program

Implementation is more likely to be sustained if we are committed to continuous improvement, the refinement of this action plan, and the capacity to monitor change and adjust plans. We are only done when our vision statement is part of the core St. Brendan School culture, and everyone in the school community says, “This is the way we do things around here”.

Recommendation:

SEL team continues to meet and monitor progress; ongoing feedback will be gathered to ensure the efficacy of the program.

ACTION PLAN

- 1) *No Bully* provided all faculty members with an in-service training in March 2010 in how to run a *Morning Meeting*.
- 2) On August 20, 2010 the SEL team will provide faculty and staff with a refresher training on running a *Morning Meeting*. The principal will select faculty members to present an experiential example of a *Morning Meeting*.
- 3) At the August 20th meeting, teachers will examine the self-evaluation tool, which will be used at the end of the year.
- 4) Teachers will have the option to incorporate the SEL program as one of their professional goals.

- 5) At monthly faculty meetings, there will be an articulation component that will include an SEL component.
- 6) The principal will notify parents about *Morning Meeting* at back-to-school night and in the family newsletter.
- 7) Anecdotal data will be gathered informally from the parents throughout the year by the administration, faculty and staff.
- 8) The students will be encouraged to provide observations and journal reflections of their SEL experiences.
- 9) Commencing the 2010-2011 academic year, the *Morning Meeting* program will be implemented.