Boys Town Education Model®

Creating Connections with SEL and Boys Town
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Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has long been a focus of education. Included in early discussions of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), SEL generated a lot of excitement about its potential to be considered, alongside academic indicators, a measure of student and school success.

However, when it came time to solidifying ESSA goals, social-emotional learning appeared to be excluded from many state plans, largely due to its perceived incapacity for monitoring student improvement. Fortunately, for teachers and students, this was not true for all states. In fact, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) reported that Massachusetts will include SEL training in its professional development for teachers, Connecticut will use federal funds to improve learning environments in schools, and South Carolina is expected to incorporate skills such as “self-direction” and “perseverance” in its graduate framework. The Education Model developed by Boys Town (BTEM) supports districts and educators in these, and other states, with their implementation of SEL, through concrete strategies and approaches that can be implemented, monitored, supported, and tracked.

For more than 100 years, Boys Town has provided services for professionals working with youth to promote the development of social-emotional, academic and career readiness. The BTEM is a school-based intervention strategy that focuses on managing behavior, building relationships and teaching social skills. It emphasizes preventive and proactive practices rather than reactive responses to deal with student behavior and create a climate of connection.

When students feel supported and encouraged academically, their behavior and attitudes toward school improve (Blazar & Kraft, 2016).
Social and Emotional Competencies promote immediate and prolonged academic and social rewards for students, enhancing their achievement in reading, mathematics, and other core academic subjects. These same skills are foundational for becoming healthy, competent, and responsible adults and citizens. If we as educators want to meet state ESSA goals in academic measures, it is imperative that we address the SEL needs of all students. Research shows that when students feel supported and encouraged academically, their behavior and attitudes toward school improve (Blazar & Kraft, 2016).

**What steps can you take to integrate SEL into your ESSA goals? Here are some tips:**

**TRAIN AND SUPPORT STAFF IN SEL STRATEGIES**

We cannot implement what we do not know. Educators require training to implement SEL strategies consistently and intentionally at a universal level. Pre-service coursework provides novice teachers with little training on how to manage classroom behavior and build relationships with students. If we want to create structured, predictable environments where students can thrive, teachers need guidance and support. Boys Town equips educators with the tools needed to implement SEL strategies in a multitude learning environments across schools and districts.

**TEACH SOCIAL SKILLS**

SEL proficiency is attained in much the same way as academic competency, therefore social skills to be taught can be determined similar to academic objectives. Once a school or district has identified and prioritized its target skills for SEL, lesson plans can be generated and distributed for teachers to use. Here are some examples of lesson plans emphasizing SEL skills.

**PRACTICE AND REINFORCE**

The implementation of SEL is new for many educators, and therefore will require both practice and reinforcement. The development of Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s) to support staff as they begin to utilize and internalize new strategies can help. Well run PLCs provide teachers with access to coaching as well as opportunities to address the challenges associated with SEL implementation. In addition, finding creative ways to praise and reinforce staff throughout the school year as they work to meet the SEL needs of students can serve to energize and fortify implementation attempts. After all, happy teachers lead to happy students!
As we strive to understand and conform to new ESSA protocols, we must focus on the important role that SEL plays in academic achievement. Boys Town can help schools and districts gain a foothold and better support their students, by showing staff how to blend academic and SEL instruction. For more than three decades, Boys Town’s education experts have collaborated with scholastic agencies to establish safer, more effective learning environments. These partnerships, involve everything from on-site assessment and hands-on training, to ongoing consultation and evaluation services. The goal is always the same – to maximize student success by reducing disruptive behaviors and creating healthy school environments. The Boys Town Education Model® is one intervention used for this purpose. It has three interconnected components:

» A social skills curriculum that empowers students to make better decisions.

» A behavior-management approach that is proactive rather than reactive.

» A consistent referral process that values teaching over punishing.

These components can be integrated into individual classrooms, schools, or entire districts to fundamentally improve the educational experience for students, staff, and parents. Educators from every corner of the country, at every grade level, can use The Boys Town Education Model® to meet their students’ social, behavioral and emotional needs.

REFERENCES