

Northwestern College, Iowa

NWCommons

---

Master's Theses & Capstone Projects

Education

---

Summer 2022

## Social Emotional Learning Curriculum and Implementation at Saint Cecilia School

Rachel Eash

*Northwestern College - Orange City*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/education\\_masters](https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/education_masters)



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Eash, Rachel, "Social Emotional Learning Curriculum and Implementation at Saint Cecilia School" (2022). *Master's Theses & Capstone Projects*. 439.

[https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/education\\_masters/439](https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/education_masters/439)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Education at NWCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses & Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of NWCommons. For more information, please contact [ggrond@nwciowa.edu](mailto:ggrond@nwciowa.edu).

**Social Emotional Learning Curriculum and Implementation at Saint Cecilia School**

Rachel Eash

Education Department, Northwestern College

EDU635: Capstone

Dr. Ken Hayes

August 21, 2022

**Abstract**

The following school improvement plan is about implementing a Social Emotional Learning curriculum at Saint Cecilia School in Ames Iowa. Saint Cecilia is a private preschool through sixth grade elementary school. At the time of this school improvement plan Saint Cecilia did not have a Social Emotional Learning curriculum that was used universally. Students exhibiting behavior problems was increasing at the school each year. The school improvement plan was developed using research from the DeWitt Library at Northwestern College in Orange City Iowa. The researcher discovered that the best Social Emotional Learning program for Saint Cecilia is PATHS. PATHS is a Social Emotional Learning Program for prek to sixth grade students. PATHS is one of the most studied programs and the results indicate that students' performance is SEL improves after receiving instruction in PATHS.

*Keywords:* private school, behavior problems, PATHS, Social Emotional Learning

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	2
Introduction.....	5
Literature Review.....	7
Who are We?.....	23
Community Characteristics.....	24
Mission and Vision .....	24
School Characteristics.....	24
Student Characteristics.....	25
Student Performance.....	26
Professional Development and Teacher Work .....	28
What is the Problem? .....	29
How do We Know?.....	31
Data Summary .....	31
School Strengths .....	32
School Challenges.....	32
Assessment Options .....	33
Action Plan.....	33
Purposed Improvement Plan.....	34
Impact on Teaching and/or Learning.....	34
Alignment to Research.....	34
Summary .....	35
Implementation of School Improvement Plan .....	36

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

Intro.....36

Timeline .....36

Responsibilities .....38

Progress Monitoring.....38

Barriers and Challenges .....39

Conclusion .....40

References.....42

## **Social Emotional Learning Curriculum and Implementation at Saint Cecilia School**

### **Social Emotional Learning Curriculum Implementation**

Social emotional learning has become a focus in schools over the last few years. Changes in families and society are leaving students at a greater risk for developing social and emotional problems. The following factors have influenced students' social and emotional skill development: living in poverty, lack of parent support, changes in family composition, and a decline in traditional social values (Gunter et al., 2012 p. 151). "Children with social and emotional deficits may exhibit difficulty connecting with teachers and classmates, develop internalizing behavior problems, or use physical aggression to convey their needs" (Gunter et al., 2012, p. 151). The problem at Saint Cecilia School is there is no SEL curriculum or intervention system that is universally used at the school. Over the past year in my classroom, I have had an increase of students who have needed behavior interventions. In the 2020-2021 school year 3 of my 16 students (about 19%) needed behavior interventions. This year, 2021-2022, 8 of my 25 students (32%) needed a behavior intervention. If this trend were to continue in the 2022-2023 school year, I could have 45% of my students who need a behavior intervention this would be about 11 of my 25 students. Not only are the students who receive the behavior interventions impacted by an SEL curriculum, but the whole class is impacted as well. Each student would get the opportunity to improve his or her social emotional learning through a SEL program.

Social emotional learning consists of five key areas: self-awareness, self-control, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Ferreira et al., 2021, p. 53). It is important to not only focus on students' academic readiness skills, but also on their social emotional skills. "SEL helps students to recognize emotions first in themselves and then in others so they can also develop empathy. SEL curricula directly teaches children appropriate

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

actions and provides a safe environment for them to practice what they learn (Ferreira et al., 2021, p. 53). The purpose of this school improvement plan is to identify which SEL curriculum is the best fit for Saint Cecilia School as well as the training that will need to be given to teachers to implement the curriculum. It is my hope that by implementing a SEL curriculum at Saint Cecilia School there will be a decrease in students who are receiving behavior interventions.

Resources for this school improvement plan were compiled from the DeWitt Library at Northwestern College in Orange City Iowa. To be considered the articles had to be published within 5 to 10 years (2012-2022) and published in a peer reviewed journal. Studies involving SEL curriculum, SEL in the preschool classroom, mindfulness, teacher training in SEL, social skills, executive functioning, and SEL intervention were all considered. 20 sources were selected based on their relevance as well as their support for the topic. The studies were used to gain an understanding of the various SEL curriculums available, teacher professional development on SEL interventions, as well as background knowledge on SEL education.

Findings of this school improvement project will educate classroom teachers and administration on the importance of implementing a SEL curriculum at Saint Cecilia School. SEL curriculum and interventions are shown to have a positive effect on students' academic as well as social competences (Flook et al., 2015, p. 44). This project will provide the school with the needed information to make an informed choice on the best SEL program for Saint Cecilia. The SEL program that is the best fit for Saint Cecilia School is PATHS. PATHS is an SEL curriculum that focuses on enhancing the emotions knowledge, social problem-solving skills, and self-control (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018, p. 32). PATHS is a PreK through 6<sup>th</sup> grade program. Students who participate in PATHS show improvement in their understanding of emotions, social problem-solving skills, and social behaviors (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018, p. 32).

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

The following literature review will start with an overview of the components of SEL education as well as the importance of it. Types of SEL interventions will be described as well. Section number two will have a focus on alternative approaches to SEL education. These alternative approaches are often combined into a traditional SEL intervention program. Teacher professional development in SEL education will be found in the third section. Professional development needs to be given to teachers and other school personnel, so they can implement the SEL program proficiently. The final section is about SEL programs available to schools and childcare facilities. There are many programs available. The overview will include a comparison and contrast of the programs.

### **Review of the Literature**

There are many resources available to educators and caregivers about social emotional learning. These resources not only describe what social emotional learning is, but also provide ways to help children develop their social emotional skills. Many of the resources have been accessed by caregivers as well as teachers over the last two and a half years because of the pandemic. Children were not given the opportunity to socialize with others as much and when they did socialize their socialization looked different. For example, mask wearing did not allow children to see each other's faces which led to not being able to recognize emotions on the faces of others. As a result, caregivers and teachers noticed a lack in children's social emotional skills. This lack of social emotional skills has led to a greater need for social emotional interventions, strategies, and trainings. This need is not only apparent at the early elementary level, but at all levels in the school system.

### **The Components and the Importance of Teaching Social Emotional Learning**



## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

In the last ten years social emotional learning (SEL) education has become a “buzz word” in education. Parents, caregivers, community members, and school staff are all hearing about the importance of SEL education. But what is SEL? According to Mondri (2021), social emotional learning (SEL) consists of five core competency areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships skills, and responsible decision making. These five competency areas are at the heart of SEL education. In his study, Ferreira, describes each component more thoroughly. “Self-awareness: the ability to recognize a person’s emotions, thoughts, and their influence on behavior. Self-control: the ability to regulate one’s emotions thoughts and behavior in different situations. Social awareness: the ability to assume the other’s perspective and empathize with people from different cultures, understanding the social and ethical norms of such behavior. Relationship skills: the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships. Responsible decision making: the ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety, social norms, and considering the well-being of oneself and others” (Ferreira et al., 2021, pp. 53).

These competences encompass many skills that are desirable not only for students in the classroom, but also to function as a productive member of society. When an individual is self-aware, he or she can recognize when they are upset and understand how that feeling will affect their behavior. The ability of self-control allows individuals to think through a situation that is upsetting before acting on their emotions. In our diverse world students need to be able to empathize with others and understand others perspective (social awareness). Everyday adults and children are using relationship skills to interact with their peers. It is important for everyone to be able to establish healthy relationships with others in their family, workplace, and among their friends. These relationships lead to a sense of connectedness and a feeling of being part of a

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

group, both are feelings that we as humans search for. Responsible decision making is at the core of what students are taught each day in school. But these decisions are not just limited to school. For example, adults must decide to follow the traffic laws to stay safe. Students enter school with a wide range of social and emotional skills. It is important for teachers to recognize the five core competencies of SEL, so they can identify when a student is lacking in one of those areas and develop a plan to help that student make growth.

McClelland states the four SEL models are social learning theory, pretend-play, coercion theory, and cognitive regulation (McClelland et al., 2017). Social learning theory focuses on how children interpret social cues and respond to social challenges (McClelland et al., 2017). Social learning theory is the model that I use the most in my classroom. This theory involves reading books, looking at pictures, and watching videos where children are displaying various emotions. As a class or small group students discuss what the character might be feeling, why, and what they should do in that situation. Where-as the pretend play model focuses practicing social roles during play (McClelland et al., 2017). This is when a student acts out a scenario that might happen in a classroom. For example, two students might act out fighting over a toy. Then as a group the teachers and students would discuss what should happened in that situation. According to McClelland, interventions based on the social learning theory have had positive impacts on students' SEL skills, whereas interventions based on the pretend play model have not shown to have a large impact on SEL skill development in students (McClelland et al., 2017).

Coercion theory models are based on developing a teacher's abilities in teaching SEL skills, the focus is mainly on classroom management (McClelland et al., 2017). This model involves teachers attending professional development on classroom rules, routines, promoting positive behavior, as well as how to deescalate negative behavior. Many of these skills are taught

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

to pre-service teachers in their college classes but these teachers are not able to implement the skills they have learned for potentially years until they are in their own classroom. The Coercion theory has been shown to improve student behavior in all SEL domains (McClelland et al., 2017). But for this theory to be effective teachers and school staff need to be given the professional development on a regular basis to keep their knowledge current. In contrast the final model, cognitive regulation, is designed to improve a single SEL skill such as executive functioning (McClelland et al., 2017). This model uses yoga, mindfulness, and meditation which have all become more common in education over the years. This theory might be done in just one classroom versus in the whole school. This model has led to increased cognitive regulation at not only the behavioral level, but the neurological as well. (McClelland et al., 2017).

No matter the intervention theory or program that is implemented in a school the most important aspect is for the teachers and caregivers to have a united understanding of the goals of the program. This allows for consistency in the students' homes as well as schools. When there is consistency students will make greater growth both at home and school in their SEL skill development. Grahl and King are both teachers at an early childhood center in the United States. Their article "Self-Motivation and Learning" describes what their school does to provide an environment that encourages not only academic excellence, but the ability for students to regulate their behavior and emotions. "We believe that the effectiveness of character education must be rooted in a common school vision that is shared by all our stakeholders" (Grahl & Kong, 2020). All the individuals involved in a child's life need to see the importance of SEL education. For this to happen these individuals need to be provided with training on the program (teachers and school staff) as well as literature or a presentation that explains what the program will teach their child to do (caregivers of the student). SEL education is an effective way of improving a

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

student's behavior not only at school, but at home as well. It is my job as a teacher to prepare my students to be successful not only in my classroom, but outside as well.

**Alternative Approaches to SEL Education**

The variety of theories surrounding social emotional education have led to alternative approaches to SEL education. These approaches can be combined with a traditional intervention program to provide greater results in students' SEL skill development. The alternative approaches involve a whole classroom approach as well as teacher education about developing relationships with students. One of the highest reported character strengths among early elementary teachers is love and kindness (Haslip et al., 2019). Displaying love and kindness toward students is one of the best ways to develop a strong relationship with them. When these characteristics are displayed, they show the student that the teacher cares about them and that they matter. When a student feels cared about, he or she is more likely to open up to the teacher and display positive behavior in the classroom. One way for children to develop values and character strengths is for the adults around them to model these behaviors (Haslip et al., 2019). This modeling either encourages or discourages behaviors that students may be displaying. For example, when a teacher is upset about something a child has done but is able to handle this situation without yelling and speaking calmly students are more likely to display this behavior when they are upset with their peers as well. These behaviors lead to children who have secure relationships with others around them. These secure relationships lead to students who are more self-confident and successful at school (Haslip et al., 2019). Another way to foster prosocial behavior is morning meetings, positive behavior guidance that focuses on teaching social skills, and reinforcing kindness along with cooperation (Haslip et al., 2019).

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

The classroom set up can also foster prosocial behaviors. Payne, Falkner, and Adair studied three early childhood classrooms to discover how students' interactions with the classrooms led to prosocial behaviors among the students. The first interaction they discovered was students hanging up their artwork in the classroom (Payne et al., 2020). When students hang up their artwork, they feel that they have a say in the classroom which leads to a feeling that they are important to the class. Another interaction that was discovered was the sharing of materials (Payne et al., 2020). These sharing interactions were not initiated by the teacher, but by the students. Students are likely to share materials when they have seen their teacher model sharing as well as when they want to play with a peer. For example, if two students are playing with blocks and they decide to build a town with the blocks together. They will then begin to share the blocks. This initial sharing interaction helps to strengthen the two students' relationship with each other. By strengthening this relationship students are developing their relationship skills a core competency of SEL education. In a study by Özbey and Köycegiz, students retained these social skills throughout their time in the preschool classroom (2019).

There have been many studies about the effects of music and art education on students' social skill development. It is believed that art and music education both formal and informal have a positive effect on students' social development. In her study Williams (2018), argues that coordinated rhythmic movement supports self-regulation. Self-regulation is the ability to monitor actions and thoughts in ways that are appropriate. One way to introduce rhythmic movement is to incorporate songs and chants into the everyday aspects of the classroom like clean up time, washing hands, going to lunch, walking in the hallway, etc. "Group music play in preschool appears to motivate children with typically lower levels of emotional regulation to demonstrate and practice emotional regulation skills during music time" (Williams, 2018, p. 92). I use music

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

in my classroom on a regular basis. I have seen students who typically don't want to be involved in a large group activity get excited when instruments are pulled out or when we begin to sing a song. Music can also be incorporated into other activities that promote self-regulation such as yoga and mindfulness activities. I use music to help my students calm down. For example, after we come back from recess or PE, I will play a quiet song for a few minutes to help students recenter and be ready to learn.

Art activities such as painting, drawing, collage making, and sculpting are common in my preschool classroom. These are typically activities that all students like to participate in. In a study by Çetin, it was discovered that art education had a positive effect on students' prosocial skills (2021). Students in the experimental group scored higher on a social skills assessment after 7 weeks of art education than students in the control group (Çetin, 2021). To encourage these prosocial skills of persistence, cooperation, and collaboration students need to participate in process-oriented art versus product-oriented art (Çetin, 2021). Students need to be given a variety of art materials and allowed to make anything they want with those materials instead of being told what they must make. This encourage the development of responsible decision making, self-control, and social awareness because students will need to share the materials and they cannot use all the materials because some need to be left for their peers. Music, art, classroom interaction, and character development can all be easily incorporated into the classroom along with SEL interventions. The combination of these activities will lead to students developing stronger prosocial skills.

### **Teacher Professional Development in SEL Education**

For educators to implement SEL education effectively in their classroom they need to receive professional development in SEL education. There are a variety of options in

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

professional development ranging from books on SEL education, online trainings, and in person trainings. Professional development should be geared towards the SEL intervention theory or program the educator is implementing in his or her classroom. There are some professional development opportunities that are universal for any type of SEL intervention or program being implemented.

The Pyramid Model is a design that is used in many SEL intervention curriculums. The first tier of this model is for teachers to create universal practices that develop responsive relationships and a supportive environment in the classroom (Hemmeter et al., 2016). This tier includes developing behavior expectations in the classroom, providing activities such as morning meetings which develop peer and teacher relationships, as well as helping students to work through conflicts with peers. This tier is for all students in the classroom. Tier two is explicit social emotional teaching that promotes skill acquisition, fluency, generalization, and maintenance (Hemmeter et al., 2016). This tier can be for all students in the classroom or for students who need to be taught social emotional skills. This involves SEL interventions and curriculum that teachers are implementing in their classroom. The third and final tier is intensive individualized interventions that address persistent challenging behaviors (Hemmeter et al., 2016). This tier is for individual or small groups of students who are displaying a challenging behavior consistently. The teacher pulls this student or students individually or in small groups to teach social skills. A SEL intervention is used for this tier.

For a teacher to implement the Pyramid Model effectively professional development on this model needs to be given. Hemmeter et al., studied teachers who received professional development in the Pyramid Model versus teachers who were just told to implement the model and did not receive professional development. The researchers found that teachers who received

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

professional development on the Pyramid Model had higher implementation of the Pyramid Model versus teachers who were asked to implement the model and did not receive professional development (2016). It was found that professional development which focused on improving implementation of practices is most effective when it “explicitly defines observable indicators of the practices, provides multiple exemplars of what the practices look like when implemented in the classroom, provides teachers with opportunities to learn about and implement the practices with explicit feedback about implementation, includes information that links changes in teachers’ practices to child progress monitoring and child learning outcomes.” (Hemmeter et al., 2016, p. 143).

For professional development to be the most effective teachers also need to receive feedback on how they are doing implementing the skills they were taught in professional development. When I receive feedback on how I am teaching or on a practice I have implemented in my classroom I feel that I am better able to adjust to make the practice even better than when I don’t receive any feedback. It was discovered that children with teachers who received professional development and effective feedback on the Pyramid Model had higher social skills and fewer behavior problems than children whose teachers did not get feedback or professional development (Hemmeter et al., 2016).

Another area of professional development in SEL education is education on child center beliefs, interaction with children, as well as child development. These are typically areas teachers receive education in when taking college courses. But all pre-service programs are different, so it is important for all teachers to receive regular professional development on these topics occasionally. This will allow all teachers in a district to be on the same page when it comes to child center beliefs, interactions with students, and child development. Child-centered beliefs



## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

emphasize that children are capable learners who make their own knowledge by interacting with the world and they learn best when teachers are sensitive and responsive to their actions and interests (Lang et al., 2016). Child development education involves learning about the various milestones children develop as they grow older. “Research shows that children’s school readiness depends not only on their cognitive skills, but also on their physical, mental and emotional health and ability to relate to others” (Omdal, 2017, p. 105). Educators need to be aware of the cognitive, physical, mental, and emotional milestones children should be reaching at various ages to best educate their students. When teachers are educated on child-center beliefs and child development they respond to their students with positive social guidance when redirecting a child’s behavior (Lang et al., 2016).

Teachers cannot just be taught in professional development about child-center beliefs, child development, and how to interact with children in professional development. They need to receive coaching on these topics as well. When teachers received coaching on interacting with children in a positive way children’s prosocial skills went up (Landry et al., 2014). This coaching needs to offer feedback that provides teachers with information about how to improve their interaction with children as well as examples of what these interactions look like. This type of coaching allows the teacher to immediately implement the feedback and improve their interactions. Another strategy to add to coaching is reflection and documentation of children’s behavior. These reflections and documentations allow teachers to discuss children’s behaviors with others and staff can be responsive and work together to improve the behaviors (Omdal, 2017).

### **SEL Programs Available to Schools and Childcare Facilities**

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

There are many SEL curriculums available to schools and early childhood care facilities. “SEL curriculum directly teaches children appropriate actions and provide a safe environment for them to practice what they learn” (Gunter et al., 2012, p. 151). SEL curriculums help teachers to know how to teach social skills as well as what social skills are developmentally appropriate for the children they are teaching. The positive effects of SEL education typically remain with a student for at least 6 months after implementation of the curriculum or intervention, but some research is indicating that the effects can last much longer (Gunter et al., 2012). Nine SEL curriculums and/or interventions will be reviewed below.

The HighScope program is a conflict resolution program where teachers and students work collaboratively to suggest possible solutions that will resolve conflicts which arise in the classroom (Yang et al., 2021). One way that I initiate conflict resolution in my classroom is by asking each student who is involved in the conflict if he or she has a solution. For example, if two students are arguing over a toy, I ask them if they have a solution to solve this problem. I then listen to each of their solutions and come up with which one is the best for this situation. Teachers can also ask questions to extend students’ thinking and to put themselves in other’s shoes (Yang et al., 2021). This can be done by showing pictures to students of a child displaying a feeling such as mad, happy, sad etc. The teacher can then ask how students think this child is feeling and why the child might be feeling that way. In one study by Yang et al, after the implementation of the program students were able to negotiation and communicate with others to come up with a solution to their conflict (2021). This program can be adapted for Pre-K on up.

Connecting with Others: Lessons for Teaching Social and Emotional Competence program is designed for low-income and at-risk families (Schultz et al., 2011). This program is federally funded. There are 30 lessons divided into 6 skill areas: Concept of Self and Others,

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

Socialization, Problem Solving/Conflict Resolution, Communication, Sharing, and Empathy/Caring. Teachers typically deliver 1-2 lessons a week for an hour. These lessons can be delivered in a large group, small group, or in independent activities. Implementation of this program led to increase in desirable social and emotional behaviors and decrease in more problematic behaviors (Schultz et al., 2011). This curriculum is for students in preschool. Another program for lower elementary students is You Can Do It! Early Childhood Education Program is a curriculum-based program for students ages 4-7. This program uses direct instruction using puppets, role playing, feedback to students when they misbehave, and teaching self-talk to teach students social skills (Ashdown & Bernard, 2011). The results of a study indicated that the curriculum had positive effects on students' levels of social emotional competence and well-being. (Ashdown & Bernard, 2011). Both of these programs use strategies that are appropriate for preschool age children to teach social skills, but neither program can be adapted for older elementary students.

“Mindfulness training enhances attention and EF by bringing awareness to a particular attentional object, whether it is the breath, external stimuli, thoughts, or emotions.” (Flook et al., 2015 p. 45). The Kindness Curriculum is a 12-week mindfulness based prosocial skills training for preschool age students (Flook et al., 2015). The foundation of this program is mindfulness practices to cultivate attention and emotion regulation with an emphasis on kindness practices (Flook et al., 2015). Mindfulness does not have to just be implemented by using the Kindness Curriculum. I implement mindfulness in my classroom by playing quiet music and asking students to focus on taking deep breaths. While they are breathing, I ask them to feel their heartbeat begin to slow down. I explain that this shows they are calming their bodies and will be ready to move on to the next activity soon. A study of the Kindness Curriculum was conducted

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

with an intervention and control group. Each group was given a sharing task, a delay of gratification task, a dimensional change card sort task, and a Flanker task. Students who participated in Kindness Curriculum shared more often with their peers than students in the control group (Flook et al., 2015). The intervention group also earned higher grades than control the control group (Flook et al., 2015). The intervention was particularly helpful for students with a lower social skill baseline. These results suggest a brief mindfulness training can enhance academic and prosocial skills in preschool age children (Flook et al., 2015). These mindfulness training tasks can be found online or in books. Mindfulness training is beneficial for all students not just preschool students. The Kindness Curriculum is just for preschool students, but all students could benefit from implementing mindfulness activities into the classroom.

A Strong Start Pre-K is a structured and partially scripted program which covers specific objectives and goals to help prevent emotional and mental health problems and develop vocabulary to express feelings (Gunter et al., 2012). The Strong Start Pre-K program is specific to students in preschool, but Strong Start Kids is the version of the program for students in K-5. This curriculum has short engaging lessons which are reinforced with repetition (Gunter et al., 2012). The curriculum consists of ten lessons with two optional booster lessons a bulletin is sent home to caregivers at the end of each lesson (Gunter et al., 2012). The bulletin sent home to caregivers allows teachers and parents to use the same vocabulary when discussing social emotional learning at home or school. The bulletin communicates to caregivers what social emotional skills students have been working on. This allows caregivers to also focus on these skills at home. When students are not only getting practice with their social emotional learning at school, but also at home their prosocial skill development will increase. Research indicates

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

increase in social emotional regulation for students who receive instruction in this curriculum. (Gunter et al., 2012).

Preschool PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) is based on social learning theory (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). This curriculum focuses on enhancing the emotion knowledge, social problem-solving skills, and self-control for 3-5 year old students. There are 33 weekly lessons that address friendship skills, awareness and communication of own and other's emotions, self-control strategies, as well as skills for interpreting and coping with difficult situations (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). The teaching strategies in Preschool PATHS includes modeling stories, emotional coaching, puppets, role-play, games and discussion to teach social skills (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). These strategies are highly engaging with preschool students. PATHS K-6 is the curriculum for elementary school students. This curriculum involves similar teaching to Preschool PATHS. Students who participated in PATHS showed improvement in understanding emotion, social problem-solving skills, and social behaviors. (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). PATHS is one of the most researched and studies SEL curriculums available today.

The Incredible Years Dinosaur Social Skills and Problem-Curriculum is based on coercion theory and focuses on enhancing classroom management, climate and children's ability to self-regulate (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). This curriculum is for students in Pre-K to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. It teaches emotional awareness, empathy, perspective taking, friendship skills, anger management, social problem solving, emphasizes teacher management skills, school rules, as well as how to cope and succeed in school (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). This is one of the only SEL curriculums that focuses on classroom management and classroom environment. This would be a good curriculum for a Pre-K to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade elementary building. A study found this

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

program effective in increasing positive social behavior and reducing unwanted behavior (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). Teachers who participated in this program received higher ratings in social emotional instruction versus teachers who did not participate (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). If a Pre-K to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade building decided to adopt this curriculum all of the teachers would need to receive training in this program for it to be effective.

Preschool RULER and RULER are school-wide intervention programs for Pre-K to middle school. The focus of these programs is on developing emotional intelligence in children and important adults in their lives (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). Social-emotional learning is embedded throughout the day instead of just at one time. In one study of RULER it resulted in improved school climate, academic performance, and increase pro-social behavior. (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). This program is appropriate for a whole district to use for elementary and middle school buildings. If this program were developed by a district each building would be able to use the same language and teach the same SEL skills. It allows for a cohesive SEL education program.

Al's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices is for 3-8 year old students. The goal of this program is to foster self-control, problem-solving, conflict resolution, and healthy decision-making (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). Teachers are trained to create nurturing classroom environments that strengthen students' personal and social skills and support development of behaviors related to resiliency (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). The teacher training offered with this program allows teachers to implement it with fidelity in their classrooms. Unfortunately, it is only available for students in lower elementary, so it would not be the best program to develop for a building with Pre-K to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Al's Pals teaches students to regulate feelings and behaviors, engage in peaceful problem-solving and conflict resolution, and appreciate differences

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

in others (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). This is one of the only programs that seeks to prevent and address bullying and to convey the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). Research findings have indicated AI's Pals strengthened children's social-emotional competence and positive coping skills. (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018).

With all the SEL programs available which program is the best for Saint Cecilia? A program that is sequenced, active, focused, and explicit leads to better student outcomes than programs that are not (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). Preschool PATHS and PATHS is a program that is sequenced, active, focused, and has explicit instruction. For the best results of a SEL curriculum it needs to be implemented with high quality. "High quality implementation of the programs leads to better student outcomes and emphasize the importance of teachers' openness and buy-in with the curriculum" (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018, p. 37). To implement a program with high quality teachers, need to be given training on the program and all the resources that come with the curriculum. It is also beneficial to identify students who are at the highest need of SEL intervention. These students typically benefit more from an intervention program than students who are not identified (Murano et al., 2020). By collecting data in the classrooms on unwanted behaviors teachers can begin intervention services sooner with the students who need it. These interventions can be planned and delivered based on the data that is collected which leads to effective implementation of the program (Riggleman, 2020). These interventions are important if teachers are still waiting to finish training on the program or have not received all the materials for the program yet. By implementing an intervention the teacher is helping the student or students with the least amount of SEL skills begin to learn skills and apply those skills in the classroom.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

Social emotional learning consists of five core competency areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Mondi et al., 2021). These competencies are at the heart of all social emotional learning education. These five core competencies can be taught using four SEL models. These models are social learning theory, pretend-play, coercion theory, and cognitive regulation (McClelland et al., 2017). These SEL models can also be combined with alternative ways to teach SEL skills. Alternative SEL techniques involve mindfulness training, art, and music. All of these alternative techniques are shown to improve students' SEL skills.

Another way for teachers to foster prosocial behaviors is for adults to model these behaviors for the students (Haslip et al., 2019). The classroom set up can also foster prosocial behaviors. Teachers need professional development to help their students gain SEL skills. This professional development should be focused on an SEL intervention theory or program the teacher is planning on implementing in the classroom. Professional development can include the Pyramid Model, child center beliefs, interactions with children, and child development. Teachers also need feedback and coaching on implementing the SEL program. This feedback should be concrete and offer advice on how to improve SEL in the classroom. There are many SEL programs that can be considered when choosing one to implement in the classroom or district. It is important to consider the needs of the school and district when choosing the program.

### **Who Are We?**

Saint Cecilia School is in Ames, Iowa. Ames is home to Iowa State University. Many students at Saint Cecilia have at least one parent who is affiliated with the university in some way. They may work for the university or are a current student there. Caregivers of students at Saint Cecilia value academic, religious, and social education. Saint Cecilia prides itself on



## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

offering an education that educates the whole child, not just with a focus on academics. The following school profile will provide more information on who Saint Cecilia is as a school.

### **School Mission and Vision**

The mission of Saint Cecilia School is to provide a Christ centered educational environment. That offers students opportunities to develop self-discipline, individual academic excellence, cultural awareness, and a commitment to lifelong service (Saint Cecilia School, n.d.). This mission is displayed when teachers provide opportunities to students to track their own academic growth and to make academic goals based on their academic performance. Students participate in a service project each month. This provides an opportunity for students to not only help others, but to learn about the world around them. For example, when students are raising money to provide clean drinking water in another country they are given the opportunity to learn about the this country as well as how they can help the people living there.

“The vision of Saint Cecilia School is to provide a quality Catholic Christian education that stimulates lifelong learning and nurtures responsive, productive citizens” (Saint Cecilia School, n.d.). This vision is attained by developing an educational plan that is both academically and spiritually enriching which fosters individual needs through curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment tools (Saint Cecilia School, n.d.). Students are provided opportunities to work with teachers one on one to make growth in the spiritual or academic education. In these one on one opportunities teachers may be working with a student on an academic or spiritual goal he or she has.

### **School Characteristics**

Saint Cecilia is a small Catholic elementary school in Ames, Iowa. There is one preschool teacher, two kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers, one third grade, fourth

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

grade, fifth grade, and sixth grade teacher. There is a part time music, guidance, PE, and art teacher. Many of these teachers are parishioners at Saint Cecilia Catholic church or another Catholic church in the area. In the 2021-2022 school year there were 166 students enrolled in preschool through fifth grade. The 2022-2023 school year will be the first year with sixth grade offered. This small environment allows for many of the teachers to know each student from preschool to sixth grade. This creates a welcoming environment where each student is greeted in the morning by name.

### **Student and Community Characteristics**

There were 77 girls and 89 boys enrolled at Saint Cecilia in the 2021-2022 school year. Many of these students were white followed by Hispanic, African American, multi-racial, and Asian. Of the 166 students four were English Language Learners. 21 students qualified for free or reduced lunch. This information was obtained from Panorama. Ames is town of about 65,000. Many people who live in Ames work for the university or are students there. There are five elementary schools, one preschool building, one middle, and one high school in the town. Saint Cecilia is located on the north side of Ames and near where the Gilbert school district starts. The Gilbert district on the north side of Ames. Some students from Saint Cecilia attend Ames and some attend Gilbert when they enter middle school. This has led to Saint Cecilia working to prepare students to enter middle school in two different districts.

### **Parent Involvement**

Saint Cecilia has a high parent involvement rate with 80% of parents reporting as involved or very involved in the school according to a survey sent out by the Family School Association of Saint Cecilia. One of the groups parents are most involved in is called the Family School Association (FSA). This group organizes events such as Trunk-or-Treat, ice cream

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

socials, teacher conference dinners, etc. Another area for parent involvement is on the Gala committee. Each year Saint Cecilia hosts a Gala to raise money for the school. The Gala committee consults the principal on a need in the building such as new desks, signs, technology etc. and then the money raised from the Gala goes to that need. Parents also have the opportunity to each lunch with their child, attend parent teacher conferences, open house, and the end of the year picnic. Each of these events are very well attended by parents.

### **Student Performance**

Students in kindergarten through fifth grade in the 2021-2022 school year participated in FAST Bridge assessments in both literacy and math. 81% of the students at Saint Cecilia were at benchmark in literacy. The following information is a breakdown at each grade level for literacy: kindergarten 81% at bench mark, first grade 90% at benchmark, second grade 87% at benchmark, third grade 79% at benchmark, fourth grade 61% at benchmark, and fifth grade 83% at benchmark. In math 83% of the students were at benchmark. The math breakdown is as follows: kindergarten 76% at benchmark, first grade 95% at benchmark, second grade 96% at benchmark, third grade 83% at benchmark, fourth grade 67% at benchmark, and fifth grade 80% at benchmark.

Attendance can play a role in how students perform academically. In kindergarten 14% of students were chronically absent, 0% in first grade, 13% in second grade, 13% in third grade, 11% in fourth grade, and 0% in fifth grade. First grade had no students chronically absent and has the highest percentage of students who met benchmark in both literacy and math. Whereas fourth grade had 11% chronically absent and had some of the lowest percentages for students at benchmark in math and literacy. The reasons for students being chronically absent can range from being sick several times to not wanting to come to school because of a problem with peers

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

or the teacher. Research has shown that implementing a SEL curriculum can improve students attendance and when students are in school their academic skills will improve as well.

### **Current Student Learning Goals**

The learning goals of students at Saint Cecilia come from the Archdiocese of Dubuque, which is similar to a school district in the decisions that they make. The following learning goals are from the Saint Cecilia School website:

- Demonstrate knowledge of God and the Catholic religion and show evidence of spiritual growth
- Effectively communicate for a variety of purposes
- Observe, infer, analyze, and evaluate ideas, processes, structures, and organizations
- Solve problems and resolve conflicts individually and cooperatively
- Apply creativity and skill in the performing and fine arts
- Be responsible members of local and global communities
- Make decisions based on Gospel values
- Be responsible and respectful of the environment
- Formulate and achieve healthy lifestyles
- Effectively and morally use technology
- Develop lifelong goals and strategies for living

Saint Cecilia has also developed a profile of a graduate, a fifth or sixth grade student who graduates from the school. The above learning goals help students to meet the profile of a graduate. Below is the profile of a graduate from the Saint Cecilia School website:

Persons of Faith Who:

- Love God, God's teachings, and God's Church

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

- Are confident in who God created them to be
- Have a personal relationship with God that includes an active life of prayer
- Are secure in God's love for them and listen to the Holy Spirit to guide them
- Approach God and God's creation with reverence

## Life-Long Learners Who:

- Demonstrate growth to mastery in all academic areas
- Problem solve to find answers to the unknown
- Always bring their best selves to their academic work
- Accept mistakes as part of the learning process
- Set academic goals for themselves and take steps to achieve them
- Persevere through challenges

## Persons With and For Others Who:

- Are kind and respectful
- Listen, compromise, and demonstrate flexibility
- Collaborate and are inclusive
- Understand Catholic social teaching and solidarity with those in need

## Proactive Citizens Who:

- Make healthy decisions
- Think through their actions to choose the good
- Understand that their choices and lifestyles can be a model for others

Teachers at Saint Cecilia work to each day to help students meet the learning goals and develop into the profile of the graduate.

**Professional Development and Teacher Work**

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

In the 2020-2021 school year a new math curriculum was implemented called Illustrative Mathematics. This curriculum was very different from the one previously talked and forced teachers to think about math in a different way. Much of the professional development in the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school year centered around this curriculum. As a staff we delved into how we had been taught math and why we might be uncomfortable teaching math this “new” way. We had lots of discussions centered around number talks, math discussions, and how students need to explain their thinking after solving a math problem. This work led to a greater understanding of the curriculum and helped us to be more comfortable with it. Each year teachers are asked to create a career development plan. These plans are a goal that teachers have for their classroom. For example, the kindergarten and first grade goal were to have 80% of their students proficient in math and literacy on the FAST Bridge assessments. These goals provide us with something to work on to make ourselves better teachers.

An instructional strategy that we were encouraged to implement in our classrooms this year was to pair students in partner groups based on their academics in math and literacy. For example, students might have one partner for a math activity and another for a literacy activity. The change in the partner thinking was instead of pairing a higher student with another higher student, teachers were starting with the highest student and finding a student right in the middle academically. Those two would be partners and then the teacher would keep pairing that way until all students were paired. This was a different way of thinking for many teachers, but we noticed the difference in how partners were interacting. Partners did a better job of working together and having a set of partners of math and literacy instead of the same ones each time led to less behavior problems as well.

**What is the Problem?**

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

An area that needs improvement at Saint Cecilia is school climate and culture. Teachers at Saint Cecilia get along well with each other and communicate, but there is trouble with student behavior. During the pandemic many families at Saint Cecilia kept themselves and their children isolated. This caused some children to not socialize with others during a key time in their lives. I have noticed that many children are lacking in their social skills. In my classroom I have noticed preschool students who just play by themselves and don't want to or don't know how to play with others. When I have spoken with teachers in other grades they are noticing similar behavior. Students are arguing with each other more than in typical years and they do not have the perseverance to work through a problem or issue former students have been able to do. Students are blurting out more and arguing with teachers more than in the past as well. The best way to help eliminate these issues is through teaching students SEL skills.

Students in all grades need to be taught social skills so they can get along with their peers. Since students were isolated during the pandemic and the last two school years have been different than any year previously this is the perfect year to introduce a social emotional learning curriculum. Students need to be taught how to be in a classroom as well as how to socialize with peers and teachers. To be the most beneficial to Saint Cecilia School teachers need to have a resource that will provide them with how to teach SEL skills. This will allow all teachers to be using the same language when speaking with students. Teachers will be able to help a student correct behavior on the playground, in the lunchroom, or in their classroom. Students will hear consistent language from teachers about SEL skills when they move classrooms or when another teacher from their own is on recess or lunch duty. A SEL curriculum will also provide teachers will all the materials necessary to teach the SEL skills whether books, puppets, or other materials

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

are involved. There will be no more searching for the perfect thing to teach a lesson because everything is provided.

SEL skill development helps students to feel like they are a part of the classroom. They help to create a positive classroom environment which students want to be a part of. When students feel welcome and that they belong in the classroom they want to come to school. If students want to come to school their absent rate will go down. When students attend school their academic performance will go up.

### How Do We Know?

Students at Saint Cecilia participate in FAST Bridge testing. The following table was accessed from Panorama.

**Table 1**

*Table Showing Grade Level, Percentage of Students at Benchmark in Literacy and Mathematics and Chronically Absent Rate*

Grade Level	Percentage of Students at Benchmark in Literacy	Percentage of Students at Benchmark in Mathematics	Percentage of Students Chronically Absent
Kindergarten	81%	76%	14%
First	90%	95%	0%
Second	87%	96%	13%
Third	79%	83%	13%
Fourth	61%	67%	11%
Fifth	83%	80%	0%



Students can be absent from school for a variety of reasons. But students who are chronically absent are more likely to not feel a part of the school community. Teaching SEL skills helps students to feel like they belong at school. When looking at the above data the classrooms with a higher percentage of students chronically absent had lower percentages of students at benchmark in literacy and mathematics. The exception to this was the second-grade class. Their chronic absent rate was 13%, but their benchmark rate in literacy was 87%, the second highest in the building, and their benchmark rate in mathematics was 96%, the highest in the building. Kindergarten's chronic absent rate was the highest at 14%. This class was fourth in literacy with a percentage of 81% at benchmark and fifth in mathematics with 76% at benchmark. Even though this class had the highest chronic absenteeism rate they were not the lowest class academically, but their academics would have improved if less students were chronically absent. The lowest class in mathematics and literacy was fourth grade. This class had a chronic absenteeism rate of 11%. The percentage of students at benchmark in literacy was 61% and in mathematics was 67%. Even though they did not have the highest rate of chronic absenteeism the absenteeism rate did affect their academics. The academics that are covered in fourth grade are more advanced and when a student misses school consistently it is more difficult for him or her to get caught up.

Looking at the data (see Table 1) this is an academic weakness in fourth grade. After speaking with the fourth-grade teacher, she stated that many of her students were consistently arguing, fighting, and disagreeing with each other. She focused much of her instructional time on teaching SEL skills that typically students in fourth grade have already developed. When the pandemic started these students were in second grade. Second grade is a critical time for students

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

to begin to learn how to resolve conflicts on their own and this class missed three months of school in which they would have been given the opportunity to learn and practice these skills.

The first and fifth grade classes had the lowest percentage of students chronically absent at 0%. This indicates that these teachers created a positive classroom environment and students felt apart of these classrooms. Students do not want to miss school when they feel connected to their teachers and peers. It would be beneficial for these teachers to speak with the staff of Saint Cecilia on creating a positive classroom environment.

Two other necessary assessments are related to students' behaviors. One is a screener given to teachers on what their students' social-emotional behavior is like. This screener is called SAEBRS and is available through FASTBridge. Another assessment is a SEL screener called mySAEBRS taken by students about how they feel about their school and interacting with their peers. This screener is available through FASTBridge. These screeners have not been given at Saint Cecilia before, but the results of these assessments would provide more data on the SEL areas that are weak at Saint Cecilia. Based on these results it can be decided where to start and if the SEL curriculum is working. The results provide a baseline of before the SEL curriculum is implemented and the same assessments can be given after the curriculum has been implemented for several months to see if there is improvement.

### **What Steps will be taken to Solve the Problem?**

The first step in the plan to solve the SEL education problem at Saint Cecilia is to administer the screeners to the teachers and students. Once the screeners are administered the data will need to be evaluated by teachers in PLCs or as a large group on a Wednesday professional development. Once the data has been evaluated and the weaknesses in SEL at Saint Cecilia have been discovered I will be able to decide the best place to start. When an area to

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

being has been identified I will provide a short overview of the area to teachers on a Wednesday professional development. This will allow the teachers to have more background on the area and feel more comfortable beginning to work on improving that area.

Social emotional learning (SEL) consists of five core competency areas: 1) self-awareness, 2) responsible decision making, 3) self-management, 4) social-awareness, 5) relationship skills (Mondi et al., 2021). These five competency areas are addressed in the mySAEBRS and SAEBRS screener. The area with the lowest score school-wide in each screener will be the area to focus on. For example, if social awareness is the lowest score school-wide that is the area that will be focused on first. Once the area of focus has been determined as a school, we will begin to plan on how to improve in that area. This improvement plan will include finding lessons in the SEL curriculum that relate to the area of focus and teaching those lessons first. Teachers will also have the opportunity to create their own lessons focusing on the selected area if they decide that is something they are interested in.

Character education is one way to improve self-awareness and responsible decision making. Self-awareness is the ability to recognize one's emotions, thoughts, and their influences on behavior (Ferreira et al., 2021). Responsible decision making is the ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions (Ferreira et al., 2021). Character education happens when students are taught about morals, responsibility, and to recognize their emotions. "We believe that the effectiveness of character education must be rooted in a common school vision that is shared by all our stakeholders" (Grahl & Kong, 2020, p.59). When we decide on the character traits that need to be taught to students as a group all of the teachers are on the same page and will be teaching the same things to their students.

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

One way for children to develop values and character strengths is for the adults around them to model these behaviors (Haslip et al., 2019).

Self-management is when one can regulate emotions, thoughts, and behavior in various situations (Ferreira et al., 2021). Self-management can be taught through mindfulness and emotional regulation. Self-management leads to improved behavior in the classroom such as less blurting out and impulsive behavior. Students see these self-management skills modeled by the adults in their lives. When a teacher or caregiver is able to control his or her behavior when upset students learn how to control their behavior as well.

Social awareness and relationship skills are taught when students have positive relationships with their peers and teachers. Social awareness is the ability to empathize and look at situations from another's perspective (Ferreira et al., 2021). Relationship skills is defined as the ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships (Ferreira et al., 2021). There are many ways to foster social awareness and relationship skills. One way to foster these is through morning meetings, teaching social skills, reinforcing kindness and cooperation (Haslip et al., 2019). When students have secure relationships with their teachers and peers, they are more likely to want to come to school. When students attend school, their academic performance is able to go up.

The SEL curriculum that is the best fit for Saint Cecilia is Preschool PATHS and PATHS. This curriculum is based on social learning theory (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). This curriculum focuses on enhancing the emotion knowledge, social problem-solving skills, and self-control for 3–12-year-old students. There are 33 weekly lessons that address friendship skills, awareness and communication of own and other's emotions, self-control strategies, as well as skills for interpreting and coping with difficult situations (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018). The

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

curriculum covers all five SEL competencies. After the SEL need is defined teachers will need training on the Preschool PATHS and PATHS curriculum. This training and coaching needs to provide specific examples on how teachers can implement the curriculum and ways they can improve their teaching of the curriculum. This type of training and coaching leads to improved curriculum implementation.

### **Implementation of the Plan**

#### **Timeline**

The implementation of the plan to improve SEL education at Saint Cecilia will take a year. In September teachers will administer the mySABERS screener to their students and take the SABERS screener for their classroom. Once these screeners are administered I will identify the SEL area that is the lowest score for Saint Cecilia. This will be the area that the intervention begins in. This intervention will take approximately four weeks. Once the first intervention is completed it will be time to begin the second intervention. The second intervention will be over the second lowest SEL score. This intervention will also take about four weeks. Once these two interventions are completed teachers will administer the mySABERS screener to their students for a second time as well as take the SABERS screener for their classroom a again. These screeners will provide me with the information on if the interventions have been successful or not. Based on the results of the screeners an intervention might need to be revisited or a new intervention on a new SEL component can begin. In April the final mySABERS and SABERS screenings will be administered. The results of these screeners will be analyzed by me to see if growth has been made in the five SEL components.

#### Timeline of Implementation

- September: teachers administer mySABERS screener and take SABERS

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

- Analyze screeners and identify the SEL area that is the lowest score
- Intervention for the lowest SEL area is implemented taking four weeks. It will begin in approximately the beginning of October.
- Intervention for the second lowest SEL area is implemented taking four weeks. It will begin in approximately the beginning of November.
- January: teachers administer mySABERS screener and take SABERS again
- Analyzation of the results of the screener will be evaluated to find if there is need for another intervention.

### **Resources**

There are several resources that are needed to implement the SEL interventions correctly. One resource is access to mySABERS and SABERS. Both of these screeners can be accessed through FASTBridge. This is an assessment tool Saint Cecilia uses each year. SABERS and mySABERS are screeners on social emotional development of students. SABERS is the screener a classroom teacher fills out for each student. The questions that are asked in this assessment deal with how the student gets along with peers, handles challenges, behavior in the classroom, as well as the student's perception of his or herself. mySABERS is a screener each student fills out. The questions that are asked relate to their relationships with peers, how they feel about school, and how they feel at home. Another resource is the SEL curriculum PATHS. This curriculum will provide a basis for the SEL interventions that will be administered during the school year. Teachers will need to receive training in mySABERS and SABERS. These trainings can be accessed through FASTBridge. Classroom teachers will be asked to complete these trainings at the beginning of the school year in August. These trainings are necessary so teachers know how to administer the screeners to their students as well as how to complete the screeners

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

themselves. This will ensure that each teacher knows how to administer the screeners and that no matter what class students are in the screeners are administered correctly. When the screeners are administered correctly the data that is collected from them is accurate.

The trainings need to be completed in August because the first round of screeners will be administered in September. Teachers will also need to receive training on PATHS. Training in PATHS is necessary for each teacher to feel comfortable administering the lessons provided in PATHS. The training will allow teachers to implement the program with fidelity. It is important for the lessons to administered with fidelity because when they are the lessons are proven to improve students' SEL skills. This training will be provided by myself during professional development Wednesdays in August and September. The training will be provided at this time because teachers will begin to administer the lessons beginning in October. Beginning the trainings in August and continuing through September will guarantee that the trainings are completed before August.

**Responsibilities**

Analyzing the data collected by the screeners will show which SEL areas students at Saint Cecilia are proficient in and which areas need improvement. This analysis will provide the information to decide which SEL area to begin interventions. I will be responsible for reviewing the screener data and determining which SEL component to begin with. The lowest scored SEL area will be the area that interventions begin in. I will rate the SEL areas from lowest score to highest score. This information will be shared with classroom teachers, so they are able to see an outline of what SEL components they will be teaching their students.

Classroom teachers will be responsible for implementing the interventions that align with the SEL component that is the focus for that intervention time frame. For example, if the lowest

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

score for students at Saint Cecilia is social awareness that will be the area that interventions begin. I will identify the lessons in PATHS that relate to social awareness and teachers will implement those lessons with their students. I will be available to teachers to provide training over any questions they have about the interventions as well as help to implement the interventions if needed. Two interventions will be administered before the mySABERS and SABERS screenings are administered again. The results of SABERS and mySABERS screeners will indicate if the interventions were successful or not.

If students' scores in the SEL components in which an intervention was administered improve than those interventions were successful. If students' scores did not improve the interventions were unsuccessful. If the interventions are unsuccessful I will speak with the classroom teachers to see what they feel is not working in relation to the interventions. Based on what the teachers say I will research other potential intervention lessons offered through PATHS to implement in the classrooms.

### **Barriers and Challenges**

Barriers and challenges exist for every intervention that is administered in a school. One barrier that could impede the success of this plan is buy in from the classroom teachers. I will need the classroom teachers to believe that the SEL interventions are needed and will be beneficial to our students. When teachers have buy in they are more likely to implement a plan with fidelity. "High quality implementation of the programs leads to better student outcomes and emphasize the importance of teachers' openness and buy-in with the curriculum" (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018, p. 37). The professional development provided on PATHS will help to develop buy in with the teaches. Professional development that focuses on improving practices is effective when it defines observable indicators of practices, provides examples of what it looks



## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

like, offers opportunities to learn about and implement practices and provides feedback (Hemmeter et al., 2016). It is my goal to provide professional development that has the above qualities.

Another barrier or challenge could be students who are English Language Learners. These students might struggle to understand some of the intervention lessons that are presented because of their limited understanding of English. Cultural differences could have an impact on student understanding of the intervention as well. For example, in some cultures it is polite to not look someone of higher authority (a teacher) in the eye, but in the United States that is one way to show respect to a teacher. One way to combat the struggle that English Language Learners might have would be to communicate with their families and the ELL teacher about the SEL learning goals. The ELL teacher would have the opportunity to work with these students on their SEL goals while they are at school. By communicating with the families about the student's SEL goals the families know what is expected of their child at school. The families could work on these SEL skills at home as well.

### **Conclusion**

Social emotional learning (SEL) consists of five key areas: self-awareness, self-control, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Ferreira et al., 2021, p. 53). There are four SEL models that are used in SEL education. These four models are social learning theory, pretend-play, coercion theory, and cognitive regulation (McClelland et al., 2017). There are also alternative approaches to SEL education such as mindfulness training, music and art education, as well as classroom set up. SEL education benefits students not only in the classroom, but once they leave the classroom as well. "SEL helps students to recognize emotions first in themselves and then in others so they can also develop empathy. SEL curricula

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM AND IMPLEMENTATION

directly teaches children appropriate actions and provides a safe environment for them to practice what they learn (Ferreira et al., 2021, p. 53).

Teacher professional development is one key to implement a SEL curriculum successfully. These professional development opportunities need to provide teachers with feedback and examples of how to implement the program into their classroom (Hemmeter et al., 2016). Teachers should also receive professional development opportunities in how to interact with students as well as what behavior is developmentally appropriate for students to be displaying (Lang et al., 2016). Coaching is another key component to professional development. This coaching needs to offer feedback on how teachers can improve their interactions with students and how to improve their implementation of the SEL program.

The problem at Saint Cecilia School is there is no SEL curriculum or intervention system that is universally used at the school. Saint Cecilia needs a SEL curriculum to use to improve their students' SEL skills. The positive effects of SEL education typically remain with a student for at least 6 months after implementation of the curriculum or intervention, but some research is indicating that the effects can last much longer (Gunter et al., 2012). The SEL program that is the best fit for Saint Cecilia School is PATHS. PATHS is an SEL curriculum that focuses on enhancing the emotions knowledge, social problem-solving skills, and self-control (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018, p. 32). PATHS is a PreK through 6<sup>th</sup> grade program. Students who participate in PATHS show improvement in their understanding of emotions, social problem-solving skills, and social behaviors (Gershon & Pellitteri, 2018, p. 32). By implementing PATHS at Saint Cecilia students' SEL skills will improve and the culture at Saint Cecilia will be better.

### References

- Ferreira, M., Reis-Jorg, J., & Batalha, S. (2021). Social and emotional learning in preschool education-a qualitative study with preschool teachers. *International Journal of Emotional Education, 13*(1), 51-66.
- Flook, L., Goldberg, S. B., Pinger, L., & Davidson, R.J. (2015). Promoting prosocial behavior and self-regulatory skills in preschool children through a mindfulness-based kindness curriculum. *Developmental Psychology, 51*(1), 44-51. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038256>
- Gershon, P., & Pellitteri, J. (2018). Promoting emotional intelligence in preschool education: a review of programs. *International Journal of Emotional Education, 10*(2), 26-41.
- Grahl, J., & Kong, J.-L. (2020). Self-motivation and learning Donald Stewart Early Childhood Center. *Journal of Character Education, 16*(2), 55-59.
- Gunter, L., Caldarella, P., Korth, B.B., & Young, K.R. (2021). Promoting social and emotional learning in preschool students: A study of strong start pre-k. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 40*(3), 151-159. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-012-0507-z>
- Hemmeter, M. L., Snyder, P. A., Fox, L., & Algina, J. (2016) Evaluating the implementation of the Pyramid model for promoting social-emotional competence in early childhood classrooms. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 36*(3), 133-146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121416653386>
- Landry, S. H., Zucker, T.A., Taylor, H. B., Swank, P. R., Williams, J. M., Assel, M., Craford, A., Huang, W., Clancy-Menchetti, J., Lonigan, C. J., Phillips, B. M., Eisenberg, N., Spinrad, T. L., de Villiers, J., de Villiers, P., Barnes, M., Starkey, P., & Klein, A. (2014). Enhancing early child care quality and learning for toddlers at risk: The responsive early

- childhood program. *Developmental Psychology*, 50(2), 526-541.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033494>
- Lang, S. N., Mouzourou, C., Jeon, L., Buettner, C. K., & Hur, E. (2016). Preschool teachers' professional training, observational feedback, child-centered beliefs and motivation: Direct and indirect associations with social and emotional responsiveness. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 46(1), 69-90. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-016-9369-7>
- McClelland, M. M., Tominey, S. L., Schmitt, S. A., & Duncan, R. (2017). SEL interventions in early childhood. *The Future of Children*, 27(1), 33-47.
- McLeod, B. D., Sutherland, K. S., Martinez, R. G., Conroy, M. A., Snyder, P. A., & Southam-Gerow, M. (2016). Identifying common practice elements to improve social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of young children in early childhood classrooms. *Prevention Science*, 18(2), 204-213. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-016-0703-y>
- Mondi, C. F., Giovanelli, A., & Reynolds, A. J. (2021). Fostering socio-emotional learning through early childhood intervention. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 15(1), 1-43. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-021-00084-8>
- Murano, D., Sawyer, J. E., & Lipnevich, A. A. (2020). A meta-analytic review of preschool social and emotional learning interventions. *Review of Educational Research*, 90(2), 227-263. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654320914743>
- Omdal, H. (2017). Creating teacher capacity in early childhood education and care institutions implementing an authoritative adult style. *Journal of Educational Change*, 19(1), 103-129. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-017-9315-y>

Riggleman, S. (2020). Using data collection applications in early childhood settings to support behavior change. *Journal of Special Education Technology*, 36(3), 175-182.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0162643420942763>

Schultz, B. L., Coombs Richardson, R., Barber, C. R., & Wilcox, D. (2011). A preschool pilot study of connecting with others: Lessons for teaching social and emotional competence. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39(2), 143-148.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-011-0450-4>

Yang, W., Peh, J., & Chin Ng, S. (2021). Early childhood teacher research and social-emotional learning: Implications for the development of culturally sensitive curriculum in Singapore. *Policy Futures in Education*, 19(2), 197-215.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210320983499>