5 BACK-TO-SCHOOL SEL STRATEGIES

FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

The first days and weeks of school can be both exciting and challenging for students and adults. Social and emotional learning (SEL) can help lay the foundation for a strong school year. Here are five strategies to get started.

What is social and emotional learning?

Social and emotional learning helps students and adults develop skills and supportive environments that strengthen academic achievement, mental well-being, and long-term success. There are five core SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

1 Get to Know Students

Advocate for a focus on relationships with administrative leaders and teaching teams to provide the foundation for ongoing engagement, community, and learning. This includes reminding staff of the value of building relationships from Day 1 by greeting students with a warm smile and a calm, caring attitude. Practices to encourage and emulate include:

- Schedule 5-minute one-on-one chats with each student.
- Ask students to fill out a "Getting to Know You" questionnaire about their strengths and concerns for the school year or write "3 Things I Want My Teacher to Know."
- Use welcome activities to foster connections between students. You can use CASEL's SEL 3 Signature Practices or these prompts for ideas—but the activity itself isn't the point. The point is getting students talking, laughing, and connecting from the start.

2 Create Shared Agreements

Support efforts that include students in decision-making about their school or classroom can boost their engagement and SEL skills. For example, brainstorm shared agreements about what students want their small-group setting, classroom, or school to look, sound, and feel like.

What makes a good learning environment? What does respect and kindness look like? How will they handle disagreements? After students brainstorm individually or in small groups, decide as a class on agreements that everyone commits to upholding. You can also survey students throughout the year about how the class is going.

3 Set Goals

Embracing your expertise can include the development scripts or outlines to assist teachers and other support staff in structuring goal-setting into their weekly routine. This encourages students to practice self-management by setting goals from the start of the school year. What are three things they would like to achieve this year? How will they know when their goals have been met? What steps do they need to take to reach their goals?

Revisit these goals with written reflections or personal check-ins. What is going well? What can continue to improve? What can they do next week to get closer to their goals?

4 Welcome Families Warmly at Back-to-School Night

Back-to-School night is the perfect opportunity to demonstrate SEL and use your expertise to build bridges between school and home. For example:

- Encourage families and staff to introduce themselves and their hopes for the year.
- Engage families in your school's vision and goals for SEL and highlight how you'll work together to support children's social, emotional, and academic learning.
- Share how you'll partner with families, including how they can inform decisions and raise questions and ideas.
- Showcase SEL practices that students experience rather than just telling caregivers about SEL.

5 Check in With Yourself and Your Colleagues

As leaders of SEL, initiate regular check-ins with all adults in your building to discuss how they are implementing SEL in your school across the continuum of the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). What is working? What challenges are they having?

Here are some key messages you can share about SEL. You can also assist colleagues in using the SEL in the Classroom Self-Assessment to assess strengths and areas to develop for SEL as a universal support within the MTSS. Use the data and your collaboration skills to consult with teachers and PLC teams or provide professional development for the full faculty on evidence-based SEL strategies to implement in their setting.

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