

Social-Emotional Learning Newsletter

December 2013 Edition

A NOTE FROM YOUR COACHES: We hope everyone had a much needed and relaxing Thanksgiving break! We continue to be impressed with the level of commitment and enthusiasm we see in each classroom in relation to Allentown's SEL Initiative. At this time all supplies have been delivered to the schools. If you are in need of anything please contact one of us. Additionally please remember to fill out Unit Surveys after each unit in elementary schools and Lesson Surveys in the middle schools. With the holiday break right around the corner, this is a great time to promote the development of social-awareness and relationship skills with our students—specifically how they interact with their family members or peers around the holidays. This edition of the newsletter will focus on some tips for how you can promote these areas in your classroom. As always, please don't hesitate if you have any questions or concerns. We wish you all a happy holiday season!

Fostering Social-Awareness in Your Classroom

Social-awareness refers to a child's ability to interact with others in a way that shows respect for their ideas or behaviors, recognizes her/his impact on them and uses cooperation and tolerance in social situations. The holiday season is a great time for students to reflect on their own social-awareness. Here are some options for how you can promote this skill in your classroom during PATHS or Second Step lessons:

Holiday Tradition Quilt: Each student comes from a different culture and has his or her own customs. Use this time to allow students to share their holiday traditions with classmates. This can be done in multiple ways. One way is for each student to be given a square piece of construction paper as their "quilt" piece. On this they will draw or write a brief explanation of a custom or tradition that their family has over the holidays. When all pieces are completed, students can share aloud, if they chose, and discuss differences and similarities among themselves. This gives students a chance to reflect on their attitude towards others' traditions in relation to their own. Another option is to partner or group students together. Each student will individually discuss one tradition that his or her family has (verbally or on paper). Then partners or groups will create one "quilt" piece together that reflects some combination of both or all traditions. This shows students how to listen to other ideas, and compromise on final solutions.

Help an Outside Organization: This can be a classroom or whole school effort. The holidays are a time that many people donate extra supplies, or time, to people or organizations in need. Classrooms can discuss why it is important to provide this care to people in need, and how they might feel over the holidays. Some sort of donation effort could be made by the students such as a canned food drive, collecting pet supplies for an animal shelter, or sending holiday cards to a local hospital or nursing home. This will give students a sense of doing good for others during this time.



Above is an example of a holiday tradition quilt piece. Once each student has created a quilt piece they can be put together to make a full class quilt for display!

Promote Positive Relationship Skills with Your Students

Relationship skills are defined as a child's consistent performance of socially acceptable actions that promote and maintain positive connections with others. The holidays are a perfect time to hone in on this area so students can apply these skills to their experiences at home too. Here are some strategies to try in your classroom:

Secret Holiday Buddies: Play up the idea of "Secret Santa" in your classroom. Put all students' names in a hat or container and go around the room allowing each student to pick out one name. Explain to students that for the month they will be writing secret messages to their "buddy." These messages can include compliments or encouraging words. This will help students form a relationship with a classmate they might not normally interact with. At the end of the month let students share who their "buddy" was and have a small celebration discussing all the nice messages they received or gave.

Random Acts of Kindness Poster: Create a Random Acts of Kindness Poster for your classroom. Explain to students that a random act of kindness refers to a positive action done for them or to them unexpectedly. If students experience a positive interaction with a classmate they can add it to the poster. Younger students can draw a picture and explain it to the class. At the end of each week read over the poster with the class and recognize these positive interactions between students!

Team-Based Games: When reviewing for a test, or practicing a new skill, turn questions into a game format. Students can be put in teams and instructed to work together in order to come up with an answer to the question or problem. Before beginning the game, explain to students that they will need to cooperate in order to figure out the final answer. You can also add a bonus point for the team that works together best on each question. This will ensure those positive interactions are being recognized as well as the academic content of the game. Award a team winner based on correct answers, as well as the team who has the most points for working effectively as a team. This is a great way for students to experience authentic relationship skill building.

Bridge the Gap Between Home and School

It's easy for students to forget these problem solving skills once they're out the door for the holiday break. Before the break create a "cheat sheet" for students or have students create their own poster of doing "Turtle", "Control Signals", "Problem Solving Steps", or "Staying in Control". Tell students to hang it somewhere in their house so that they can use it when they face a problem at home. This gives students a chance to explain to their family members how they solve problems at school, and offer discussion on how it can be used at home. After the break ask if students used their posters and how it helped.



Random Acts of Kindness is a great way for students to recognize positive behaviors in others. Students will love to hear that their peers noticed their positive actions and this will attract positive attention among classmates.

School Wide SEL

Though this time of year is often filled with excitement it can also be a cause of stress for some individuals. Hearing kind words or a compliment can often be enough to change someone's day. Challenge yourself to give another staff member a compliment once a day. This small gesture will not only make them feel good, but also give you satisfaction in knowing that you helped brighten someone's day!