



Digital Learning Discussions Webinar Wrap

Supporting the whole learner:

Social and emotional Learning in remote and online education

Webinar Date: December 16th, 2020

Panelists:

Erin Craft, Student Support Administrator, Cyber Academy of South Carolina

Djuna Craig, Resource Teacher for Student Support Programs, Howard County Public Schools, MD

Bob Cole, Coordinator of Digital Education, Howard County Public Schools, MD

Five findings

1. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is often associated closely with mental health. In fact, SEL incorporates many elements including mental health, social relationships, executive function, and others. CASEL defines SEL as:

“the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.”

The CASEL framework lists six areas of focus:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

2. The pandemic has created or exacerbated mental health issues for many students, leading teachers, schools, and districts to re-focus on SEL.

3. Districts have a variety of approaches to incorporating SEL, with some of the most successful being driven by teachers’ understanding of “whole student” needs. Schools and teachers seek to have a coordinated approach, and support for, supporting students in non-academic ways. Much of this effort, particularly during remote learning, starts with teachers taking the time to engage with students much as teachers do in a physical classroom—asking about students’ well-being, issues concerning them, interests, etc.

4. Online and hybrid schools address SEL in part by having staff dedicated to working with students in a capacity that may be centered on advising, guidance, mentoring, or other roles and supports. In some schools, these roles may be handled by teachers, but in a non-teaching relationship with the student.

5. Teachers need social and emotional support too, especially during the pandemic.

Key quotes

Djuna Craig: “A few years ago we were seeing some behaviors in our young students that we were concerned about, and teachers didn’t know how to respond to. A few schools took it upon themselves to explore options about how to respond, and initially they chose different options. Some of those were successful, so as a district we began looking at how we could spread these programs to more schools. By school year 2019-20, all schools were meant to be using these programs for 15 minutes or more every day in every classroom. This was all pre-COVID. When we shifted to Continuity of Learning during the pandemic, we had lead teachers supporting other teachers in each school, with a three-part SEL program each week with dedicated time on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Each week involved one or more readings, activities, and a closure activity on Friday, tied to the specific topic. Teachers had different levels of comfort with SEL and with the remote learning technology. Some used the content as created, while others used it as a jumping off point for their own SEL efforts.

Erin Craft: “All virtual schools have challenges with building relationships with students; we don’t have the face-to-face time and the school building to use and rally around. We use several pillars, some of which are embedded in our curriculum. In addition, each of our students is assigned a student support advisor. The advisor is the student’s first point of contact at the start of the school year, and stays with that student throughout the year. In addition to the SEL elements embedded in the curriculum, the advisors use free-standing SEL content with each student. These efforts are complemented by our clubs, one of which is called the “Super-Amazing Club.” Who doesn’t want to be part of that?”

Bob Cole: “Two major issues that arose during the pandemic were, first, in the early stages when we shifted to remote, students already had a strong connection with their teachers from the face-to-face time, pre-pandemic, during the 2019-20 school year. That of course didn’t exist when we shifted to fall 2020; teachers had to create that new relationship with students. Second, elementary teachers seemed more comfortable with these concepts, and we had to expand to middle and high school students in the fall, incorporating some different approaches across the district.”

Comment from attendee

- *“We have found that when our middle school teachers take a few minutes to see what’s on the kids’ minds before they start, the kids are able to better focus on the lesson and are less distracted. They can type it into the chat privately or say it out loud. We have had everything from students saying they are hungry to students upset about drama with friends. This has also allowed us to have advisors and school psychologist check in as needed. It’s a 3-minute daily exercise and the kids seem to really appreciate it. They know that there will not necessarily be resolution, but someone is listening.”*

Links and resources from panelists and attendees

- [CASEL SEL Framework](#)
- [Ready, Set, RISE!: Free online modules from Kaiser Permanente and Discovery Education](#)
- [Building Blocks for Learning from Turnaround for Children](#)
- [Integrating the 16 Habits of Mind](#)