



Readington Township Schools Focus Efforts on Wellness and SEL

By

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At the September 24, 2019 Board of Education meeting, the Board voted to adopt district and Board goals for the 2019-2020 school year. Both the district staff and the Board of Education have made social-emotional learning, including overall wellness and climate and culture a district priority. According to the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), *“Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults:*

1. *Understand and manage emotions (Self Awareness)*
2. *Set and achieve positive goals (Self Management)*
3. *Feel and show empathy for others (Social Awareness)*
4. *Establish and maintain positive relationships (Relationship Skills)*
5. *Make responsible decisions (Responsible Decision-Making)*

This year the district has continued to infuse these five core SEL competencies into the daily lives of students through specific techniques and practices. Supervisor of SEL and Special Projects, Anthony Tumolo, along with the assistance and support of many, including the District School Counselors, have jointly led the charge to assist teachers in finding ways to infuse SEL in their daily instruction.

Students at Readington Middle School participate in something called a connection circle. This restorative practice strengthens student-student and teacher-student relationships by building trust and empathy while establishing a sense of belonging. This creates a safe community conducive for learning.

Students in the elementary buildings have a dedicated SEL period where they can fine-tune their social-emotional competence in a safe, supportive environment. These skills are applied throughout every facet of the school day. Organic, home-grown lessons are being created that are systemic, cohesive, and purposeful as they connect to the specific culture, climate, and academic curriculum in each school. Additionally, Whitehouse School conducts Town Hall meetings and Family Conferences, which over time has become part of the fabric of their school culture. Three Bridges School conducts monthly SEL assemblies that consist of teachers and students teaching the entire school community about what it means to have good character. Holland Brook School also has student-led character assemblies periodically throughout the school year. They also participate in a buddy class program created by the school climate team, led by the School Counselor, Mrs. Barbara Pauley. A fourth and fifth-grade class is paired up and together they participate in a character based activity designed by the school climate team that connects to the character theme of the month.

SEL is an important component of the academic curriculum, as it provides students with the social tools to feel connected with others. This is of increasing importance in the digital age where students are often connecting with others through online media. Additionally, this type of explicit instruction is intended to provide overall mental and physical wellness for the entire Readington School Family. Adolescent rates of suicide and physical illness are on the rise in the county. This SEL work is critically important in combating these challenging issues because it forges a positive mindset rooted in resilience and compassion, while providing educators, parents, and students with healthy tools needed to thrive in an increasingly stressful world.