



## **SEL Helps Valued Outcomes to Happen: A Series of Examples...**

### **Create Classrooms That Celebrate Who Students Are**

While creating equity ultimately requires significant shifts at macroeconomic and political levels, there is much that classrooms and schools can do right now to create environments in which diverse student learners have the opportunity to engage in learning experiences that build social, emotional, cultural, civic, and academic competence. Through this integration—which includes building competencies in the five core SEL skills—you will develop inclusive school and classroom practices that embrace the cultures and lived experiences of all students and adults.

#### **What would you look for in a classroom that integrates culturally responsive strategies and nurtures the development of the students' social-emotional competencies?**

Teachers *elicit, recognize, reinforce, and respect the cultures of all students*. Student learning and academic success are enhanced by encouraging *positive ethnic, racial, and cultural identities*. Teachers apply and help students *apply their cultural experiences to classroom learning tasks* and encourage all students to demonstrate *awareness of their historic place in society*, and in their school and community. Students are encouraged to *display and appreciate the diverse skills, knowledge, and real-life experiences that are represented in the classroom*. Teachers *focus on the assets and strengths of learners* and provide teaching and learning approaches that build on the experiences of learners.

Teachers guide each student in developing a *moral compass*. Within the classroom and coordinated across grade levels, there are systematic efforts to *build students' social-emotional competencies* for students to act in ways they can be proud of. There is a palpably supportive climate and *visible expectation that all students will achieve academic proficiency*. Students have equitable *opportunities*—to speak, participate, and lead; to join groups, teams, or clubs; and to be recognized and appreciated. Barriers that perpetuate unequal access and participations are eliminated to enable access and opportunity for all students.

Teachers *hold and espouse high expectations for all students and engage families (and community resources)* as important partners in supporting learners to achieve academic and social success. When classrooms lack aspects of diversity, students and teachers together create plans to *introduce and experience other perspectives in the spirit of widening cultural responsiveness*.

This is the minimum that should be expected of schools in preparing all children for participatory citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, regardless of their backgrounds and their individual abilities or disabilities.

## **Create a Culture of Caring, Kindness, and Helping**

A classroom is a place where students need to be helpful, cooperative, kind, and caring about one another. For 180 school days, students enter classrooms wanting to be successful, recognized, valued, and supported. With your students, create classroom rules/norms for how to treat one another. Observe existing patterns of caring, kindness, and helping within your classroom. Pay particular attention to discussing how students can help one another and seek out help from adults in the school. Make it clear that caring and kindness are the norm, not the exception, and that no students are excluded from receiving and providing these attributes.

## **Bring the Present into Classroom Conversations**

Students benefit from clear and non-stigmatizing opportunities and vehicles to express uncertainties, anxieties, and loss, and to address the issues they are seeing and hearing in the media that raise questions they want to discuss. As appropriate, have conversations with students about the following questions:

- What should you do in my class if you are feeling anxious about an exam, assignment, or project? What should you do if you are feeling distracted, saddened, or angered by losses in your life, either past losses or those you are anticipating?
- When do you learn best? Who are the people you look up to most, in your family, the community, in history, in various walks of life (sports, the arts, government, science, writing, etc.)? Why?
- What are examples of hope, heroism, and positive moral conviction and inspiration in your lives right now? Who or what provides this for you and what strengths can you draw from them that you can apply to your everyday life?
- What are examples of mistreatment of people you have seen or heard recently in your school, based on race, gender, ability/disability, or some other personal characteristic? How about your community? Let's talk about an example where *you* acted based on what you saw. What happened? What did you do? Now let's talk about an example where you did *not* act based on what you saw. What did you do instead? Why was it so hard to act? How did you feel? What is the lesson learned from those feelings (e.g., hard to take action as an individual; must be very confident about possible action; must be well-practiced and prepared for obstacles; must believe very strongly about what the injustice is; must feel supported in taking an action)?
- Acts of everyday courage—tolerance, acceptance, reaching out to others—are not simple and *do* require courage. For whom or what are you most/least willing to fight for, and why?

Based on Elias, M. J., & Leverett, L. (2021). *Addressing equity through culturally responsive education and SEL*. National Professional Resources, Inc.

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*This information sheet was provided by SEL4NJ, the Social-Emotional Learning Alliance of NJ, a voluntary, grass-roots organization working with schools and communities to promote social-emotional and character development and supportive, engaging, inclusive, equitable classroom and school environments for learning. Prepared by Maurice Elias, SEL4NJ Trustee and Director, Rutgers Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab. You can reach us at [info@sel4nj.org](mailto:info@sel4nj.org) and join at [www.SEL4NJ.org](http://www.SEL4NJ.org).*