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Developing social emotional competencies intentionally

A systemic, schoolwide approach to social emotional learning can help reach every child

Now more than ever, why is social emotional learning a key area on which administrators need to focus resources?

A big reason is due to the use of technology. On one hand, technology has made our world brighter and more connected. But it also makes us less connected. Studies on how Russian orphanages are run reveal the negative impact that a lack of human contact has on a child. Now we are seeing those kinds of intimacy disorders in more children, even those in stable home situations, due to the use of technology. On average, kids ages 7 to 17 spend nine hours a day in front of a screen.

Social emotional competencies need to be developed much in the same way academic competencies are developed—through instruction, and if necessary, through correction and intervention. Intentional SEL is important to fully develop the whole child.

How can administrators move from understanding the philosophical tenets of SEL to enacting an impactful, concrete plan?

Administrators may know that they need to move from the philosophical to the practical, but not know how to do it. They need to take cues from how they achieve academic success. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is a proactive, tiered framework model that focuses on teaching students positive, schoolwide behavioral expectations and the processes for getting their needs met in school. Those expectations must be intentional, clearly articulated and consistently reinforced across the building.

Interventions must also be intentional, with clear processes. If a student is struggling, a faculty member ought to have clear strategies for observing and coaching that student.

How is Boys Town's SEL program practical for administrators to implement?

Boys Town has a history of over 100 years of creating strategies for intentionally developing SEL competencies. Father Flanagan, our founder, believed that there is no such thing as a bad child, just bad teaching methods and bad environments. Students must be proactively taught what

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proper behavior is.

Boys Town's framework teaches social skills to youth. It teaches them how to be self-aware and socially aware. These strategies can be easily replicated by schools if they are followed with fidelity and consistency. For behaviors to be internalized, they must be reinforced. Boys Town's program teaches how to reinforce and how to have corrective conversations.

How can administrators support faculty and staff who are struggling with supporting SEL?

Key to unlocking SEL interventions is having an organizational approach as opposed to an individual approach. For example, if the rule is “following instructions means looking at the person giving directions and completing a task,” that expectation must be consistently reinforced by all staff members and clearly articulated to students. When expectations are that clear and consistent, it is easy for faculty to observe behavior and coach students and one another. The more clearly the framework is articulated, the easier it is to create a climate of learning.

Boys Town works with schools all over the world to develop these strategies. We provide old-fashioned care with new technologies. The basic strategies never change, just the technology.



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