



Healthy Options that
Promote Excellence

Using Cooperative Extension Programs to Promote Positive Youth Development Through Social and Emotional Learning

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Teachers are superheroes... They play many roles in the lives of the students they serve in and out of the classroom! One of the most important roles teachers play is that of facilitating of social and emotional learning.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a method of teaching that aids youth in gaining and successfully applying the knowledge, and skills necessary to be emotionally intelligent, establish and accomplish positive goals, be empathetic toward others, begin and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015). To aid in the successful implementation of SEL, schools are faced with the growing need to provide more than traditional classroom instruction (Payton et al. 2000).

But how does this affect teachers? According to Payton et al. 2000, schools are very often ill-equipped to adopt multiple programs to address social and health issues. In addition to that, there are several reasons social and emotional learning programs have garnered little success when implemented at the school level. Some of those reasons include:

- **No time** – Teachers have standards to meet in the classroom and face strict time constraints

when trying to deliver quality instruction in the classroom, while also implementing SEL programs (Metcalf, 2020).

- **Poor planning** – According to Meyers, Durlak, and Wandersman, 2012, “quality implementation is best achieved by thinking about the implementation process systematically as a series of coordinated steps, and that multiple activities that include assessment, collaboration, negotiation, monitoring, and self-reflection are required to enhance the likelihood that the desired goals of the innovation will be achieved.” If a program is not developed before implementation it runs a high risk of being ineffective.
- **Inadequate Coordination** – When schools do adopt and attempt to implement multiple support programs, they tend to be inadequately coordinated and must compete with other programs, and for school resources (Payton et al. 2000).
- **Lack of family support** – These programs frequently lack environmental supports from home, such as modeling and reinforcement of new skills so that youth can retain what they have learned (Payton et al. 2000). This can be discouraging for teachers and detrimental to youth development (Metcalf, 2020).



How can Cooperative Extension Agents support teachers and help students grow socially and emotionally?

- **Professional development** – Offering specialized training in social and emotional learning could aid in the effectiveness of social and emotional learning curriculums (Metcalf, 2020).
- **Adopt non-school programs** – The Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center’s (SU Ag Center) Youth Development Team is committed to creating and implementing quality programs in partnership with schools that enrich students personally, as well as academically. Through these programs, we hope to provide support

for teachers and administrators, while creating new experiences and opportunities for students.

- **Allow clubs that show teachers’ personality and passion** – Teachers often get caught up in meeting curriculum demands and hardly have time to let students know them outside of their roles as teachers (Indeglio, 2019). Allowing the SU Ag Center to create, manage, and implement SEL programs may leave space available for teachers to create clubs that show students a little more about themselves. This could create more of a safe space for students and create less instances for redirection during class time.

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