Social-Emotional Learning

A guide for Inclusive Strategies and Practices for Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in Physical Education

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About this guide

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has been a natural part of the national physical education content standards for many years and teachers have taught it without realizing they are addressing this in their classrooms. Standards four and five state that the student "exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others" and "values physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and social interaction."

This guidebook is designed to help physical educators emphasize social-emotional learning in their physical education classrooms that are inclusive of every student. The guidebook will provide classroom techniques, ideas, activities, training opportunities, and resources to help physical education programs promote social-emotional learning every day.

Introduction

When schools fail to provide enough support for students, the social, emotional, and behavioral challenges that often come along with learning and attention issues can lead to profound consequences. These include social isolation, disproportionate disciplinary rates, and an increased likelihood of skipping school, dropping out, and becoming involved with the criminal justice system. The school environment should be welcoming for all students. A welcoming environment created by the faculty/staff, students, and stakeholders can help a child maintain or improve their social and emotional health and wellness.

SEL plays an integral part in improving school climate and culture, which in turn can reduce chronic absences.[1] Chronic absenteeism is a problem across all states. If students are not in school, they are not learning the skills taught in physical education and other content areas. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation article, "The Relationship Between School Attendance and Health,"provides Physical and Mental Health barriers that exist as it relates to school attendance.[2]

Physical Health-Asthma is one of the most common causes of school absences, together with significant health concerns such as diabetes, and obesity. Research suggests that U.S. school aged children with this treatable and remediable condition miss a combined fourteen million days of school each year.

Mental Health-Fear, depression, social anxiety, and other mental health issues can make it difficult for children to feel comfortable going to school. When children are exposed to significant stress, violence, or trauma in their homes or communities, it can also trigger mental health issues that cause them to be chronically absent from school.

Physical education teachers can eliminate the social and emotional issues that students may have by using the strategies discussed in this document. Strategies may include but are not limited to, classroom environment; crisis management strategies; etc.

What is SEL?

SEL as defined by the [Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)](#) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is 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.[13]

SEL is Not a Replacement for Mental Health Services

There is an increasing concern in the rising numbers of students with emotional problems and mental health needs. Mental disorders are changes in the way that students learn, behave, or handle their emotions, causing distress and problems.[18] Students with mental disorders could be diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, and behavior disorders. Some of these conditions can manifest alone or in a combination. The data suggest that the diagnoses of depression and anxiety have increased over time. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 1 in 6 U.S. children aged 2–8 years (17.4%) had a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder. This suggests that mental, behavioral, and developmental disorders begin to manifest during childhood.[4]

It is important to understand that SEL programs focus on developing competencies or skills related to building healthy peer relationships, responsible decision making, self-management, self-awareness, and social awareness to succeed inside and outside the classroom. However, SEL programming is not a treatment for mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and bipolar disorder. While is true that students with mental health needs can benefit from SEL programming, this alone is not enough to successfully fulfill the needs of students with mental health conditions.

SEL in Education [15]

      An attribute of any society is its ability to change, evolve and diversify. As a result of society's constant change student's learning environments are also diverse. Students are experiencing their first interaction with people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, beliefs and perceptions, abilities, and socio-demographic factors. Skills that allow students to benefit and learn from these social interactions are extremely important for students' success not only in schools but in life. SEL provides skills to help students understand their thoughts and emotions, become more self-aware, and develop empathy for others within their community and the world around them. This guide will help you learn about the importance of SEL in children's development and its benefits in the teaching-learning process.

Why SEL?

The knowledge, skills, and confidence learned in a physical education classroom not only allow students to enjoy a lifetime of physical activity but also allow students to learn and refine social and emotional skills. According to CASEL, these social and emotional skills allow students to "integrate skills, attitudes, and behaviors to deal effectively and ethically with daily tasks and challenges" (CASEL, 2019). [3] Social-emotional skills are critical for students' learning, their readiness for college and careers, and their future success. Both research and evidence-based practice clearly show the strong connection between social and emotional development, academic learning, and success in life. [5]

The Connection between SEL and Academic Performance

The benefits of SEL are not exclusive to social and emotional skills, interpersonal and mental and health outcomes. There is enough evidence to suggest that students learn better when they have the skills to focus their attention, manage negative emotions, navigate relationships with peers and adults, and persist in the face of difficulty. Students that can effectively manage the thinking process, increase their attention, and control their behavior are more likely to obtain better grades and test scores. According to the Harvard Graduate School of Education Report (2017), cognitive skills such as attention control, inhibitory control, working memory/ planning, and cognitive flexibility are principal skills for behavioral and academic success. All these skills are typically an integral part of SEL curriculum that has successfully demonstrated academic and behavior improvement. Graphic 1 provides examples of how these cognitive skills are linked to student academic outcomes.

SEL benefits by the numbers:

27%
more students would improve their academic performance at the end of the program

57%
more would gain in their skills levels

24%
more would have improved social behaviors and lower levels of distress

23%
more would have improved attitudes

22%
more would show fewer conduct problems

Self-management

Empathy

Better personal & social decisions

Self efficacy & self-esteem

School commitment

Sense of belonging & purpose

Behavior management

Positive towards others

Decreased emotional distress

SUCCESS

Graphic 1. Benefits of SEL [22]

Cognitive Skills

Inhibitory Control
Controlled responses such as raising your hand instead of shouting the answer

Cognitive Flexibility
Ability to switch between two different concepts to thinking about multiple concepts simultaneously
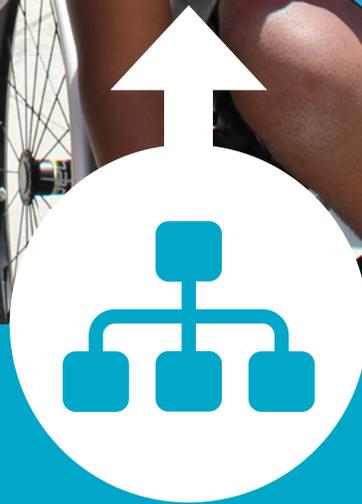
Working Memory & Planning Skills
Maintaining information over a short period of time and organize steps to complete an activity

Attention Control
Listening to the teacher and ignoring outside noise

*This graphic was adapted from the Harvard Graduate School of Education report of 2017.[7]

Classroom Strategies for SEL

Teachers need to decide the best way to set up their classrooms to allow students to express themselves and feel safe. In the process of designing your classroom, each teacher needs to develop techniques that help them implement SEL in their classroom and have a consistent feel among all classes in the gym during that time. Strategies could include a conflict corner where students settle their conflict on their own. Possibly establishing a safe zone where students can go if they need to talk to one of the teachers in the classroom and most importantly adding strategies for your lesson plans. When adding strategies, you will need to make sure that you are clear in your messaging and students can sense that they are in a safe space and can trust you. Classroom techniques can make a difference and could potentially be the same throughout the whole school community. This could include a streamlined approached to SEL throughout the school day. Either way, your classroom techniques should fall in line with the school-based approach to SEL and can be within your lesson plans. Classroom management is a part of your SEL strategies. Things to consider with classroom management are discipline and taking the time to learn why the child is truly acting out. Children who act out may be having a challenging time processing their emotions and that is the reason for the negative behavior. Good classroom management techniques can help children process why they are acting out and help them plan when they are upset, tired, or whatever else they may be during that time as well as understand that consequences are a result of choices and that a better choice next time is for the best. Students need to feel valued even if they are acting out. They need to know they are always loved and that it is okay to ask for help and talk through their emotions.

FLAGHOUSE ® SEL Learning Sets
Social and emotional skills are essential to maintaining healthy relationships and practicing self-care.

Harmony SEL™ – Evidence-Based Social & Emotional Learning Program
The Harmony Online Learning Portal provides PreK-6th grade teachers with everything they need to successfully integrate social-emotional learning program into the classroom.

According to the Harvard Graduate School of Education Report (2017), effective evidence-based SEL programs typically used a variety of instructional methods

including kinesthetic activities such as games and dancing. These are core components of quality physical education programs, and it provides a great opportunity to introduce SEL components into the physical education curriculum. Look at Table 1 to learn about other strategies to consider.

Strategy	Description
Discussion	Pose questions to students regarding how a person may feel/act in each situation.
Didactic Instruction	Provides specific instructions outside of an open discussion. This might include providing definitions, teacher modeling, or imparting specific information.
Book/Story	Read a book aloud or short story that may or may not include pictures to introduce a particular theme.
Vocabulary	Activities used to teach language, words, or terms related to an SEL concept. For example, producing synonyms for emotion words.
SEL Tools/ Handouts	Use of a tool or material to promote SEL strategies. For example, setting up a problem box to collect class problems for future discussion.
Writing	Ask students to write about a time they were angry with someone, what they did, and how it felt. For younger students instead of writing you could use drawing.
Drawing	Ask students to draw a picture of something that makes them happy rather than drawing about a specific time they felt happy.
Art/Creative Project	May be an individual project, such as using clay to make faces that show different emotions, or a collaborative project, such as creating a logo to represent team personality traits.
Visual Display	Classroom posters that break down emotion regulation strategies, a class rules chart, or a hanging circle that represents the connection between thoughts, actions, and feelings.
Video	Videos typically depict children in challenging classroom or playground situations and are often used to prompt discussion around emotions, conflict resolution, and appropriate behaviors.
Song	A song might lead students through the steps for a calm breathing technique or problem-solving process.
Skill Practice	Students might practice paraphrasing what their partner just said to practice good listening skills.
Role-Play	Act out emotions, demonstrate/practice emotion regulation strategies and problem-solving processes, or practice managing conflict/interpersonal challenges. Use puppets for younger students.
Game	Playing feeling charades to help teach about emotions and social cues.
Kinesthetic	Activities involving student movement and physical activity such as dancing.
Teacher Choice	This gives the teacher the opportunity to use strategies that might not be listed in a specific SEL curriculum.
Other	Poetry, visualization exercises, deep breathing, and more.

Table 1 Classroom SEL Strategies

Teacher Interaction

Students traditionally replicate the behaviors they see in their environments. They often take up the behaviors of their parents and teachers. As a result, teachers need to think about how they treat one another daily. They need to always display empathy and work with one another. It is also important that you do not belittle the administration at your school and/or district level. Students are watching you and some of the things they believe come from you, as well as their parents. An example of this is athletes being taught that they were cheated by the officials after a loss instead of gracefully accepting defeat and understanding that the other team was simply better that day. This mindset often comes from how the school, teachers, coaches, and parents react to the loss. The issue is that most times, the adults shake it off and prepare for the next game, but the athletes now have the mindset that the officials from that game have something against them and for the remainder of the season believe that those officials are discriminating against them. Another example would be when a teacher has a conversation with a student about how another teacher must not like them based on their grades or talks badly about another teacher. You start the mindset that the teacher you are talking badly about does not like that student or students in general and that becomes an excuse for the student.

SEL instruction must address the multicultural identity of the students to help ensure that all students have meaningful participation in SEL programs. Educators should invest time and efforts to gain multicultural competencies that allow you to respect, value, and leverage students' identities, backgrounds, and cultures.

SEL initiatives should be available to all staff and not limited to just students. Teachers and staff in your school also need to be included in any efforts to improve health and wellness including mental health. Those responsible for implementing SEL programs into the school curriculum could benefit from practicing SEL constructs themselves. This could be beneficial for many professional careers but is mostly true for those in the complex and demanding field of education.

Panorama Education Adult SEL Toolkit
This guide will equip you with the strategies and tools you need to strengthen adult SEL and teacher wellness.

Greater Good for Education – SEL for Students: Emotions and Culture
Culture impacts how we view and express emotions.

New York State Education Department - Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework
The CR-S framework helps educators create student-centered learning environments.

Learning Outcomes

Teachers should build their lesson plans so that they include evaluation and assessment of social-emotional learning. This should include the beginning of class, during the class, and end of class. The learning outcomes could potentially help you identify the emotions of your students even when they are not able to express how they are feeling themselves. If you do not add learning outcomes specific to social-emotional learning to your daily lesson plans, you are more likely to leave this piece out of your classrooms and classroom planning. Learning outcomes should be connected directly to the lesson of the day. They need to be through assessment and evaluation of the subject matter.

SEL in Physical Education [14]

The goal of physical education is to develop individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity.

To pursue a lifetime of healthful physical activity, a physically literate individual:

- Has learned the skills necessary to participate in a variety of physical activities.
- Knows the implications and benefits of involvement in diverse types of physical activity.
- Participates regularly in physical activity.
- Is physically fit.
- Values physical activity and its contribution to a healthful lifestyle.

Physical Activity in the Classroom

Physical activity and/or action-based learning in the classroom has been linked to increased academic performance which can help boost self-confidence. The average student does not learn best through auditory but through visual learning and hands-on experience. A student who sits all day may not be showing his/her potential due just simply because of the way the materials are presented. Physical educators should work with administration and classroom teachers on policies related to providing different means of instruction to help students learn better and boost self-esteem in the classroom.

What does SEL look like in physical education?
Examples of Physical Education Skills that Align with SEL.

Elementary School
- Beginning to learn how to make decisions for the benefit of personal fitness and health.
- Working well independently, cooperatively, and safely
- Identifying activities that bring confidence and challenge.

Middle School
- Positive communication with peers in small and large-group activities
- Learning how to develop and implement a plan for personal fitness and health
- Beginning to make decisions about implementing FITT independently
- Identifying the importance of positive social interaction in physical activities

High School
- Analyzing personalized physical activity plans and designing appropriate goals
- Assuming leadership roles in group settings while positively communicating with all classmates
- Identifying and evaluating the opportunity for positive social interaction
- Examining moral and ethical conduct
- Applying stress-management strategies

SEL for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities might experience disability-specific challenges that are related to social functioning, emotion regulation, and executive functioning. [19] Disabled students might experience these challenges at various levels depending on the variation of the disability playing a critical factor in the elevated risk for social isolation and discrimination that have been documented.[10] Students with disabilities can benefit from acquiring and enhancing social and emotional skills in the classroom.

In addition to social isolation and discrimination, the lack of support for students with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges can lead to serious consequences. These include disproportionate disciplinary rates and an increased likelihood of skipping school, dropping out, and becoming involved with the criminal justice system. [15] SEL should be made a priority for all students, especially those from traditionally underserved populations, like students with disabilities.

Table 2

Social-Emotional and Behavioral Challenges for Students with Disabilities [16]

Students with learning and attention issues often experience feelings of failure, lack of acceptance among their peers, and high levels of bullying, which can increase the risk of misbehavior and absenteeism.

Students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be suspended as students without disabilities, and the loss of instructional time increases the risk of repeating a grade and dropping out.

Over 1 million students with IEPs miss three or more weeks of school a year, which can affect academic achievement—and increase the risk of dropping out.

The dropout rate for students with learning disabilities is nearly three times the rate for all students.

Failure to address learning and attention issues too often leads to students being incarcerated, which further disrupts their education and contributes to high dropout and recidivism rates.
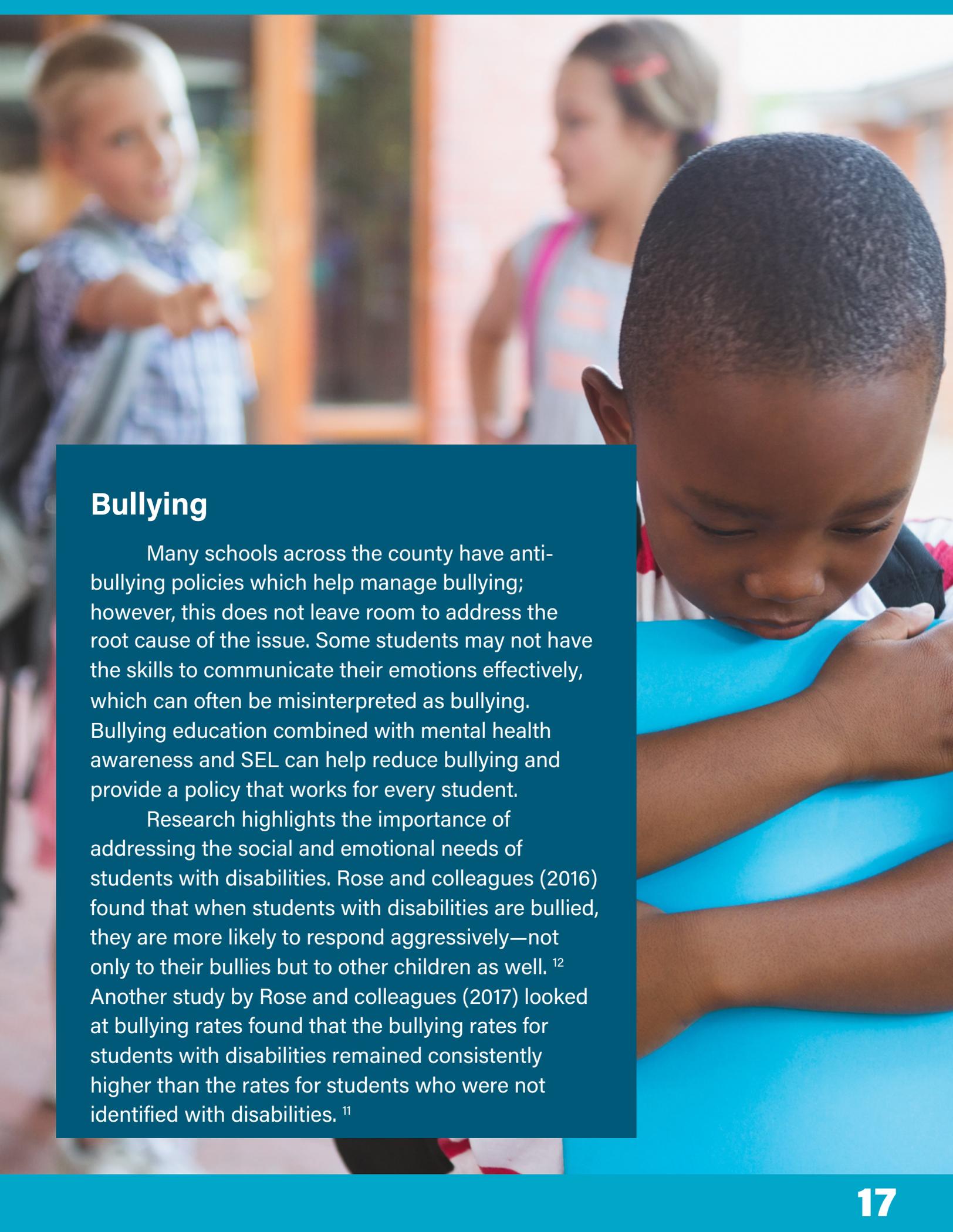
Bullying

Many schools across the county have anti-bullying policies which help manage bullying; however, this does not leave room to address the root cause of the issue. Some students may not have the skills to communicate their emotions effectively, which can often be misinterpreted as bullying. Bullying education combined with mental health awareness and SEL can help reduce bullying and provide a policy that works for every student.

Research highlights the importance of addressing the social and emotional needs of students with disabilities. Rose and colleagues (2016) found that when students with disabilities are bullied, they are more likely to respond aggressively—not only to their bullies but to other children as well. [12] Another study by Rose and colleagues (2017) looked at bullying rates found that the bullying rates for students with disabilities remained consistently higher than the rates for students who were not identified with disabilities. [11]

Strategies for Addressing Crisis in Physical Education (Emotions)

Students can have a challenging time processing their own emotions and become angry and act out. This can happen in the classroom, on the playground, or in your physical education class. It is best to have a plan on how to address students' social-emotional needs in your class. Strategies can include the following:

First, assess the environment and be sure everyone is safe when addressing the crisis. Next, try to get the student to walk with you to another location. This will help remove the student from the environment that may have caused the crisis. The key is for it to be the student's idea. The teacher should not use threats. For example, "come with me or else." If the student walks with you, great, if not, try to build that rapport with the student that is experiencing the crisis. Try to defuse the crisis by speaking in a calm voice, not mentioning any consequences the student will have because of the situation. Then look at the steps below:

1

Safe Space
This would be a space where students know they can go and safely express their feelings. The teaching staff would take turns monitoring the class while another teacher addressed the student in the safe space. If needed, one teacher would personally take the student to the counselor instead of having them go there alone.

2

Solution Sheets
These sheets are designed to help students identify their emotions, express why they are mad, and discuss potential solutions for the next time.

3

Conflict Corners
These are designed to help students resolve their differences without the need for teacher intervention. They still need to be monitored by the teacher and have clear guidelines that each student agrees to and understands.

4

SEL concepts into your lesson plan
Utilize resources that would help address SEL as part of your lesson plans. Several organizations like OPEN physed have lesson plans already developed that have SEL concepts written into them. Make it part of your routine so that students learn that it is okay to share how they are feeling and know that your gym is an area where they can be honest and reach out if needed.

The Conflict Corner

This one management strategy can save hours of listening to tattling, resolving student conflicts and also empower students to figure out ways to solve their problems without the help of a teacher.

When developing your strategies, keep in mind that the listed suggestions may not be a fit for your school. You know your students and how they interact with each other and if you do not feel it is a good fit for you, develop a strategy that works for you. You must research different ideas and ways to address SEL in your classroom and begin to develop your strategies.

This guidebook is designed to help you get started with ideas and strategies to implement SEL into your physical education program. We encourage you to explore the resources, strategies, and ideas mentioned in this guidebook to help you plan for your school. As stated previously, not every child can process their emotions so you must understand that it may take time to find a way that is effective and works for your population and classroom. The biggest thing you can do is create a safe space for sharing as well as educate yourselves as much as you can on the principles for SEL and Emotional Intelligence.

Stay tuned as we plan to add to this guidebook by providing activities, games, and additional strategies from the field within the next year. Also, check out our SEL visual cue cards that are designed to help you see how your students are feeling simply and effortlessly.

Physical health - is the well-being of the body and the proper functioning of the organism of individuals, which is a normal condition for individuals of both physical, and mental condition who are not suffering from any type of sickness.

Mental health - includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

Emotions- a conscious mental reaction (such as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as a strong feeling usually directed toward a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes in the body.

Health equity - means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.

Physical activity - refers to all movement.

Physical education -The class in which all students learn the importance to be physically active for a lifetime. In physical education, students learn how to move their bodies fluently and develop theknowledge, fitness, physical skills, and personal social skills necessary for a lifetime of health and physical activity.

These blue boxes are resource highlights
Click on the title of each resource to find it online.

Additional Resources

Alliance for a Healthier Generation – The Resilience in School Environments (RISE) Initiative

Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety

Harmony Social and Emotional Learning

National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)
- NASBE Policy Update (2019)

National Center for Safe Supportive Schools (NCS3)

Online Physical Education Network (OPEN) – Tools for Creating Trauma Informed Social & Emotional Learning

Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE) – Social Emotional Learning

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

The Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE)

The PE Express Podcast
- Social-Emotional Learning Ideas in Phys Ed
- 5 Social-Emotional Learning Strategies in PE

The School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation System (SHAPE) – assessment and resource library

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