

January Staff Dev. Newsletter

A newsletter for the Seward Staff by Dr. Dominy

Happy New Year!

We had a fantastic first semester of the 19-20 school year and the credit goes to all of you! Thank you for all that you do for our students, our staff, and our schools. It is an honor and privilege to work with you every day!

Many of you know that I like to follow Jon Gordon's work around positive leadership. Jon wrote a book several years ago titled, [One Word](#), if you have not read this book, I highly recommend it- it is a very fast read. This year I have chosen the word, *Connect*, as my word of the year. Sadly, I have let relationships fade over the years and have not done a good job staying connected to the people who have contributed to my life over the years. I am committing to working to reconnect over the next year. What is your word? Your resolution? Your goal? I hope you will take some time and reflect on the upcoming year. Enjoy your time off, we will see you soon!

Mental Health Research and the Strategies we can use

Our district is action-oriented and this can be a very good thing in moving our district forward. This year, we have been focused on learning more about mental health, and I have had several teachers say that they think the learning has been great, but they want to know the strategies they can do to impact mental health. The federal government released some information about best practices regarding [mental health](#), as you read their suggestions below, I think you will note several things that have been happening in our buildings for years and several things we have been talking about during our PLC's. Most of what we do in supporting our students with mental health are not things to create, systems to follow, etc. The best way to help students is through individual conversations, modeling good mental health practices, and helping students identify the emotions that they are feeling. Our book says it best, "Be who you needed when you were in school."

What Educators Can Do in Classrooms and Schools

You can support the mental health of all students in your classroom and school, not just individual students who may exhibit behavioral issues. Consider the following actions:

- Educate staff, parents, and students on [symptoms](#) of and [help](#) for mental health problems
- Promote social and emotional competency and build resilience
- Help ensure a positive, safe school environment

- Teach and reinforce positive behaviors and decision-making
- Encourage helping others
- Encourage good physical health
- Help ensure access to school-based mental health supports

Developing Effective School Mental Health Programs

Efforts to care for the emotional well-being of children and youth can extend beyond the classroom and into the entire school. School-based mental health programs can focus on promoting mental wellness, preventing mental health problems, and providing treatment.

Effective programs:

- Promote the healthy social and emotional development of all children and youth
- Recognize when young people are at risk for or are experiencing mental health problems
- Identify how to intervene early and appropriately when there are problems

Social Skills

The section of our book, *All Learning is Social and Emotional*, that I would like to feature this month is Social Skills. Social skills can best be summarized as the skills needed to form and maintain relationships with others. Social skills are the skills that our employers point to as deficits in our current group of young people joining the workforce. Having social skills implies that you have good communication skills, empathy, and the ability to connect with others. When you think about Social Skills, where do your students have the opportunity to learn the social skills necessary for life success? Do you have opportunities for group collaboration, do you have debates in your classroom? Do you have class meetings where you discuss the things that are impacting the classroom? As I mentioned above, there is nothing to make to teach social skills- It should just come authentically from the choices that you make regarding how to teach a given topic.

Social Skills and the Evaluation Model

The teaching of social skills is best reflected in the teacher evaluation system in the following indicators:

1.2 Background Knowledge of Students: Through proven practices, the teacher uses knowledge of students to ensure high levels of learning, social-emotional development and achievement for all students.

3.1 Communication: The teacher clearly and accurately communicates to support persistence, deeper learning, and effort with effective oral and written communication.

3.4 Relationships: Teachers and students interact in a positive manner that builds trust and inspires students to believe in themselves and their teacher.