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Increasing Parental Engagement in Social-Emotional Learning at Home through Incentive Based Program: A Guideline for Implementation

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Increasing Parental Engagement in Social-Emotional
Learning at Home through Incentive Based Program:
A Guideline for Implementation

by
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Abstract

Current policies and practices strive to increase parental engagement with school activities with varying degrees of success. A lack of clear expectations and guidelines of how parents can engage in social-emotional learning within the home decreases the effectiveness of the social-emotional curriculum and negatively impacts the child's mental health. This project attempts to create opportunities for parents to engage in social-emotional learning activities within the home while also addressing barriers that often prevent parents from engaging under typical standards. Children whose parents are engaged in their lives and school-based activities feel a better sense of belonging within their family and school and less mental health related problems. By creating a program that offers clear guidelines, in addition to incentives for participating, schools can increase the parental engagement in social-emotional learning activities within the home. This project will serve as a guideline to promote increased parental engagement within social-emotional learning within school districts.

Key words: Parental engagement, social-emotional learning, incentives, mental health, Social-Cognitive Theory, Emotion-focused therapy

Table of Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Abstract | 2 |
| Table of Contents | 3 |
| Chapter One: Introduction | |
| Problem Statement | 6 |
| Significance of Problem..... | 7 |
| Background of Project | 8 |
| Statement of Purpose | 10 |
| Objectives of the Project..... | 11 |
| Definition of Terms..... | 11 |
| Scope of Limitations | 12 |
| Chapter Two: Literature Review | |
| Introduction | 14 |
| Theory/Rationale..... | 15 |
| Social Cognitive Theory | 15 |
| Emotion-focused Therapy..... | 17 |
| Research/Evaluation | 18 |
| Types of Engagement | 18 |
| Positive home environment..... | 19 |
| Effective communication | 20 |
| Volunteering | 22 |
| Promoting home learning..... | 22 |
| Decision making opportunities | 23 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Community engagement | 24 |
| Summary | 25 |
| Conclusion | 27 |
| Chapter Three: Project Description | |
| Introduction..... | 28 |
| Project Components | 28 |
| Project Implementation..... | 31 |
| Project Evaluation..... | 31 |
| Project Conclusions | 32 |
| References..... | 34 |
| Appendixes | |
| Appendix A: Parent Engagement Informational Presentation..... | 42 |
| Appendix B: Incentive Program | 48 |
| Appendix C: Parental Engagement Expectations | 50 |
| Appendix D: Social-Emotional Learning Calendar..... | 52 |
| Appendix E: Social-Emotional Learning Home Activities | 54 |
| Appendix F: Parent Survey..... | 57 |

Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Parental engagement in a student's education and mental health significantly decreases as a student enters high school (Jensen & Minke, 2017). Various reasons have caused parent engagement in their child's education and social/emotional well-being to decrease as the child gets into the secondary level. Most parents start to place ownership of responsibility on the student as they continue to develop a sense of independence (Jensen & Minke, 2017). Parents of color have also indicated feeling marginalized as schools expect parent engagement to look identical, regardless of culture, socio-economic status, and belief system (Yull et al., 2018). There also seems to be a misunderstanding between educators and parents due to educators not believing that parents are interested in engaging with their student's education, while parents believe they are only contacted when there is an issue with their child (DeSpain et al., 2018). The disconnect between educational institutions and parents on how to effectively create a positive method for parents to engage in their student's academics and social/emotional learning negatively impacts students.

Educators have widely expressed the importance of having parents engage in their student's education in order to improve academic achievement and social/emotional health (Cureton, 2020). A study demonstrated that parent engagement in a student's social/emotional health has shown a decrease in adolescent depression (Jensen & Minke, 2017). Engaged parents are able to better understand the emotional needs of their child and gain confidence in addressing these needs (DeSpain et al., 2018). Due to adolescents spending a large amount of time in a school setting, parents would benefit from working collaboratively with the educational institution.

Significance of Problem

Parental engagement in their child's educational and social/emotional practices is vital for the overall health of their child. Adolescents long for parental closeness and investment in their lives (Velez et al., 2020). Parent involvement has been widely believed to improve the overall mental health of adolescents (Birch & Hallock, 1999). Parent mattering of the child directly impacts an adolescent's mental health (Velez et al., 2020). Parent engagement has also lead to students having an increased sense of belonging within the family and in school (Cureton, 2020). The feeling that an adolescent is worth a parent's time and energy directly relates to how the adolescent responds to stress (Velez et al., 2020). Parents have the unique ability to enhance social/emotional learning (SEL) activities with their child in the home (McCormick et al., 2016).

Improving the relationships between parents and the school staff increases chances of overcoming barriers for parents to become involved (Lusse et al., 2019). Parents become part of the learning process in their child's education and emotional health when they are engaged (Mushtaq et al., 2012). A decrease of engagement by parents once the child reaches high school changes the trajectory of the student as he/she progresses through high school (DeSpain et al., 2018). Paying attention to possible barriers that parents must overcome can impede the types of engagement a parent is available for, but could improve the school to parent relationship if identified and accounted for (Lusse et al., 2019). It is also necessary to break down biases by school personnel in order to increase parental engagement within the school (Yull et al., 2018).

These barriers continually alienate parents from being an active member of their child's education. Some of the main barriers that stop parents from engaging fully in their child's education are time constraints, not trusting the school, poor communication between school and parents, lack of understanding of the subject material, and parents simply not knowing how to

get involved (Winnail et al., 2000). Time was identified as the main barrier that stops parents from engaging in their child's education more (Cureton, 2020). It is also noted that a lack of financial resources creates less opportunities for parents to engage due to working multiple jobs or long hours to provide for their family (McCormick et al., 2016).

Parents are also at risk of being too involved in their child's life, often being labeled as "helicopter parents", due to not letting their child learn how to overcome obstacles on their own (Jensen & Minke, 2017). This risk also creates instances that can be damaging towards an adolescents overall mental health (CINDEA, 2015). Over involvement of parents has also been known to lead a student have more narcissist behaviors due to the parent's behavior (Winner & Nicholson, 2018).

Background of the Project

The interaction between both schools and parents has been a common occurrence since schools were created. The early colonies actually had control over the education of their children by way of parent boards (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). Over time, this interaction has changed for a variety of reasons (UK Essays, 2018). Parental authority within schools began to decrease within the late nineteenth century and local schools authority began to increase (UK Essays, 2018). As educators worked towards higher credentials and became more professionals within the field, parents control over the education of their child began to decrease (Hiatt-Michael, 1994).

As the pendulum began to swing at the end of the Industrial Revolution, parent engagement became more of a priority beginning in the late 1980's (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). Focus on parental engagement increased with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) calling for authentic partnerships between families and all school collaborators (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020). Additionally, due to the requirement that all children be in school in response to

child labor laws created from the Industrial Revolution, parents have pushed for more control over their children's education (Hiatt-Michael, 1994).

In response to the increase in parent engagement, early education educators indicate a high rate of engagement in the child's education (Ferreira et al., 2018). This is demonstrated in a variety of ways and usually varies depending on the gender of the parent (Ferreira et al., 2018). Mothers tend to spend more time, than the fathers, around the children and thus engage more in the child's life and education (McBride & Mills, 1993). But this trend started changing as women increased their participation working outside the home, leaving less time within the home (Lang et al., 2014). This has led to a decrease in mothers having time to engage in support activities within the home, especially as a child increases in age and ability to complete work on their own (Wood & Repetti, 2004).

In the early 1960's, more attention was given to fathers and their ability to impact both the emotional and educational development of their children and not only the sole income earner of the home (Watson et al., 2012). Men's involvement allowed for additional adult support and provided a strong positive association to education for both boys and girls (Hsiu-Zu Ho., 2012). Consequently, father's involvement in their children's education and programs decreased as some men's perception of the relevance of the program didn't apply to them (Frank et al., 2015). Schools struggled to develop opportunities for fathers to engage in ways unique to fathers (Hsiu-Zu Ho., 2012).

While parents continued to desire to be more involved, policies in place created unequitable opportunities for families to become engaged (Watson et al., 2012). This was especially present with minority and immigrant families, as well as those in a lower socioeconomic standing (Cureton, 2020). Parents cited language barriers, culture, and economic

difficulties being challenges that hindered engagement opportunities (DeSpain et al., 2018). Immigrant families also face various challenges that native families don't have to face when attempting to engage in their child's school. This is due to various barriers noted previously, but also the uncertainty of their own status within the country and dealing with racism in certain situations (Snell, 2018).

In an attempt to create opportunities to engage more parents in response to the NCLB Act, school systems consequently created singular opportunities for parents to engage in their child's education (Willis & Exley, 2018). As the development of various technologies changed, schools continued to utilize similar approaches to engage parents (Willis & Exley, 2018). This unfortunately created more barriers as social norms changed in the household and as the diversity of school districts increased, all while school districts continued to use original policies and practices (Cureton, 2020). These policies recognized that teachers and administrators viewed parent engagement as attending parent-teacher conferences or scheduled meetings, while parents viewed emails, texts, or more instantaneous forms of communication as preferred engagement (Benner and Quirk, 2020). As indicated, parents and school officials both have varying preferences and expectations of what parental engagement entails. Consistent communication with clear expectations is the ideal way to make parents feel valued and engaged (Mushtaq et al., 2012).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to create a better understanding for parents on how to effectively engage in their child's school and social/emotional education. While research suggests that over-involvement of parents can be harming, the focus will be to increase the health habits and practices of parents that have high school aged students. The project will also focus on

working with school administrators and staff to promote culturally sensitive opportunities for parents to engage with their student within school and at home. This project will also create opportunities to work with high school students on how to advocate for a healthy partnership between parents and the school.

Objectives of the Project

Subjectivity of what constitutes appropriate parental engagement causes expectations of all parties involved to be misunderstood. To create more objectivity in regards to what constitutes positive parental engagement, this project will provide parents with opportunities to learn about what healthy parental engagement looks like and the benefits of it. That is, this project will educate parents about the increased benefits of parents being involved in their child's social/emotional health and all SEL activities their child participates in. The project will focus on providing learning opportunities for parents and helping to guide them to appropriate engagement with their student's mental health. The parent engagement activities will provide appropriate activities for parents, discussion questions to have as a family, and parent support groups. Parents will then be able to actively engage with their student's mental health without risking over-parenting practices.

Definition of Terms

Parental engagement: The various ways that a parent supports a student to learning and achievement, usually directly involved with the school community (Cureton, 2020).

Social/Emotional Health: The description of a person's self-esteem, behaviors, and overall mental state (depression, suicidal thoughts, response to stress, etc.) (Landy, 2009).

Social/Emotional Learning (SEL) Lessons and activities that promote health social/emotional health that is typically offered within the school (Weissberg et al., 2015).

Parent Mattering: The perception of children on how important they are to their parents (Velez et al., 2020).

Helicopter Parent: A description of a parent that over steps boundaries and takes over all components of a child's life (Jensen & Minke, 2017).

Scope and Limitations

This project will focus on how healthy parental engagement within SEL activities, positively impacts children's emotional health. Other possible impacts could be family relationships, academic success, and peer relationships. The scope of this project relies on the parents of high school aged students to understand the importance of having continued involvement within SEL activities from the school. The plan focuses on providing parents appropriate techniques on involvement, helping promote healthy conversations, and support to parents. These supports will assist parents in actively engaging with their child's emotional well-being to provide improved self-esteem.

One limitation is the willingness of parents to adopt new techniques within their parenting styles. Most high school aged students start high school by the age of fourteen. This means that parents have created routines and procedures on how to engage with not only the school but also their child over a span of fourteen years. In order for this project to be effective, parents will need to be willing to alter certain techniques and behaviors in order to effectively engage with their student. Most parents have developed parenting styles that work with their fundamental beliefs and some will be hesitant to make alterations to this. Not all parents possess the communication skills necessary to effectively communicate with their child and may lack the comfortableness in engaging their child in conversations of mental health.

Another limitation to this project is addressing the barriers that some parents have to overcome. While the project will attempt to eliminate as many barriers as possible, not all parents will be able to overcome these obstacles. Some parents lack the time to devote to their children due to the necessity of providing financially for the family. Due to parents needing to put basic needs first, parents may not be able to promote a change in their current practices of engaging with the school and a student's SEL activities.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

As a child enters high school, parental engagement in both their child's academics and overall mental health decreases (Jensen & Minke, 2017). Research indicates increased engagement with a child's social-emotional learning is beneficial for the child's mental health but also the relationship between the parent and child (DeSpain et al., 2018). The focus of this project is to increase the level of involvement parents as they engage with their child through Social Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons in order to improve both academic and social-emotional outcomes. In order to create validity in the project, a theoretical approach grounded in the Social Cognitive Theory created by Albert Bandura (1977) is utilized as the overarching basis of the project's effectiveness on helping individuals utilize experiences to learn new behaviors or support existing positive behaviors. The other major component of theoretical value is the Emotion-Focused therapy which focuses on long-term growth (Watson, 2012). Emotion-focused therapy also places emphasis on making meaning between emotional responses and understanding those emotions (Angus, 2012).

This section also focuses on the previous research conducted on best-practices to best engage parents and families in their child's SEL activities. The research outlines opportunities parents have to engage with the school community including creating a positive home environment, developing effective communication between both the school and home, volunteering opportunities, strategies to best promote learning at home, utilizing insight of parents during decision making, and engaging all stakeholders from the community (Mushtaq et al., 2012). The research also provides guidance for program considerations when creating parent engagement programs. These programs should focus on improving relationships between the

parent and child, as well as between the parent and the school (Velez et al., 2020). Successful programs also target a specific audience which increases the likelihood of participation (Velez et al., 2020). Thirdly, the focus is on positive outcomes that occur from incentivizing the participation of the program for not only the student, but incentivizing the parent as well (Levitt et al., 2016).

Theory/Rationale

Social Cognitive Theory

One major theory informing parents' engagement within SEL lessons is Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, previously known as the Social Learning Theory. The Social Cognitive theory focuses on helping individuals to manage life events in order to achieve personal or educational goals (Stone & Dahir, 2016). This theory allows the individual to focus on problem solving and how to change behaviors through goal setting (Stone & Dahir, 2016). SEL lessons are usually the most successful when one can make a connection to certain events and develop goals to make positive changes toward a certain goal (McCormick et al., 2016).

Bandura (1977) expresses the benefits of utilizing "role models" in order to exhibit appropriate competencies both formally and informally. Positive role models had an increased impact on those that were culturally striving for positive goals (Copell, 2020). On the contrary, those individuals focused on "interdependent/collectivist goals" were much more influenced by negative role models (Coppell, 2020). Negative role models are ones that exhibit negative behaviors that observers aim to avoid (Lockwood et al., 2002). In this project's use of the theory, parents that engage with SEL opportunities from the school would be viewed as positive role models that their child could observe and learn from (McCormick et al., 2016).

A central component of the Social Cognitive Theory is reciprocal determinism which proposes that human behavior is determined by the relationship between personal factors, the external environment, and the actual behavior (Smith, 2021). A change to one factor directly impacts the other factors in the cycle (Smith, 2021).

Personal Factors. Personal factors focus on the internal characteristics of the individual and the various abilities the individual possesses (Smith, 2021). Some of these internal characteristics include the cognitive functioning of the individual such as “one’s memory, planning, anticipation, and judgment” (Joseph & Padmanabhan, 2019, p. 27). Possible cognitive functioning in this theory focuses on the individual utilizing an “if-then” cognitive approach utilizing examples from either their own past experiences or the experiences of others (Ginter & White, 1982). In fact, personal experiences integrate a wide variety of emotions and cognitive processes that create one’s self-identity, how one views themselves, in a novel storied experience (Angus, 2012). Individuals utilize the memories of their past experiences to engage cognitive reasoning.

External Environment. When observing the external environment, the focus is on the external stimuli that directly impacts the individual (Smith, 2021). According to Joseph and Padmanabhan (2019), the physical setting can directly impact the motor responses, verbal responses, and social interactions of the individual. Due to this correlation, importance is placed on the individual to make sure his/her actions don’t create an environment that negatively impacts their behavior and cognitive thought process (Schumaker et al., 2013). Environmental factors are not always in the control of the individual, but Social Cognitive Theory suggests that an individual should limit the negative factors when possible (Schumaker et al., 2013).

Actual Behavior. Based on the work of Bandura (1977), behavior is both an internal thought process and external act and both are directly related to the cognitive origins of an individual (Smith, 2021). Due to behavior having both an internal and external origin, Bandura (1977) suggested that behaviors were cognitive in nature based on past experiences and the current environmental barriers the individual was experiencing. It is also suggested that a behavior is something that is continuous and reciprocal (Ginter & White, 1982). This explains the reason behind repeated behaviors and how addressing the thought process behind the behavior can help the client make healthier choices.

Emotion-Focused Therapy

While Emotion-focused therapy is not a counseling theory, it does provide important components to this project and values mentioning. Emotion-focused therapy is utilized in psychotherapy as a way for the individual to make meaning between his/her emotions and their own self-understanding of these emotions (Angus, 2012). Emotion-focused therapy places emphasis on the long-term growth and the changes a client makes over time (Watson, 2012). Forgiveness is a popular coping skill that emotion-focused therapy uses to make positive emotions against the negative emotions (Worthington & Scherer, 2004).

A study conducted by Haberman et al. (2019) on the use of emotion-focused therapy in improving social anxiety disorder in clients determined that clients engaged in this therapy had improved emotional responses to stresses and a decrease in shame. This can also be paired with an approach to be more mindful of the client's view of the present and taking these individual events as moments, instead of defining the person overall character (Gayner, 2019). It was also determined that understanding emotions was the biggest indicator of changing behavior and impacting an individual (Levenson, 2020). Haberman et al. (2019) even found that emotional

recognition positively impacted anger resolution. As recognizing emotions becomes a focus point of a client, impactful change can occur.

The crux of emotion-focused therapy focuses more on internally addressing the client's response to particular emotions and why that response is happening (Adams & Gibbons, 2019). This can be extremely useful for adolescents since adolescents typically can't make major changes to their environment but can make changes to their thought process when recognizing their emotions (Adams & Gibbons, 2019).

The difficulties with this approach, while utilizing it with parental engagement, is the lack of control the school has on its implementation in the home due to parents having their own approach to dealing with emotions (Adams & Gibbons, 2019). Culturally, parents will have their own approach on the appropriateness in engaging in conversations regarding emotions and how much should be discussed (Karakurt & Keiley, 2009). This can be especially difficult to navigate as some cultures use very little words to describe emotions and instead utilize physical actions to portray emotion (Karakurt & Keiley, 2009). It is also important to recognize that setbacks occur (i.e. arguments between parents and adolescents, lack of communication, etc.) when conducting emotion-focused therapy, and if untrained, parents and adolescents will not understand how to navigate the setback (Mendes et al., 2016). This increases the importance of the school to conduct routine check-ins with families that are participating and offer assistance when necessary.

Research/Evaluation

Types of Engagement

Parent engagement can be viewed in a variety of approaches. Mushtaq et al. (2012) references the work of Epstein (1995) about six best practices to create positive engagement

between families, schools, and the community. The following research will focus on how to incorporate these successful strategies into SEL engagement with parents.

Positive home environment. General parenting strategies in the home promote a positive environment for the children to be successful in all areas of life (Mushtaq et al., 2012). This can be done in a variety of ways but generally allows for the adolescent to demonstrate independence with specific limits and controls for the adolescents' actions (Jayalekshmi & William Dharma Raja, 2011). This balance of creating opportunity for independence and still maintaining control with limits can often lead to parents either allowing too much freedom or being too controlling in the adolescent's decision-making (Jensen & Minke, 2017). A study conducted by Suku et al. (2019) indicated education and support services could benefit families so positive routines could be created and have longevity within the household. Research also suggests that allowing the adolescent to be involved in parent meetings gives the adolescent a sense of control and helps bridge the gap between the culture of school and home (Lusse et al., 2019).

Another factor to consider in the home environment is the overall interactions between the adolescent and those who reside in the home. Homes where there is significant conflict and overcrowding create chaos in the adolescents' lives and subsequently have adverse effects on the adolescents' emotional health (Suku et al., 2019). This chaos may also be in response to moving multiple times in a short timeframe, as referenced in Cureton's (2020) study on refugee families that often experience trauma through the uncertainty of their living conditions and longevity in a particular area. This chaos can lead to emotional insecurity and as security increases, consequently so does an adolescent's courage, decisiveness, and integrity (Jayalekshmi & William Dharma Raja, 2011).

Research suggests that one barrier to parents being actively engaged in their child's education and mental health is the relationship status between the parent and child (Velez et al., 2020). While some parents stated discussing school at home could be stressful, overall, parents engaging in their child's education showed the care parents had for their children (Watson et al., 2012). Due to the complex relationships that parents and children have, utilizing strategies that teach forgiveness from emotion-focused therapy can help mend damaged relationships from past negative experiences (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Utilizing parents in this process can help their children learn how to do this with their own peer-to-peer relationships (McCormick et al., 2016).

Effective communication. Another way parents engage with schools is through effective communication from school-to-home and home-to-school (Mushtaq et al., 2012). Based on the work of Wilkins and Terlitsky (2016), which was adapted from Epstein (1995), a strong, school-led communication must be cognitive, courageous, capable, confident, connective, clear, and consistent. In order to promote parental trust in the school, effective communication must initially start from the educational institution which consequently increases the likelihood of positive communication from the home back to the school (Vellymalay & Devisakti, 2020). A study conducted by Davies et al. (2011), indicated that poor communication from the school caused a significant increase in parents alienating themselves from being engaged, especially as their child entered secondary education. Parents whose native languages are different from the language spoken in the school, as well as families that don't understand sophisticated language or professional jargon, are often left to feel inadequate (Davies et al., 2011).

Creating opportunities for parents and the school to positively interact help the adolescent to mature socially and emotionally (Jayalekshmi & William Dharma Raja, 2011).

Communication in elementary schools usually is directly given to parents upon arriving at school or when picking up their child, while secondary schools rely on posting information on the website or sending letters home with a student, which don't always make it to the parent (Davies et al., 2011). This can be remedied as direct communication can be sent directly to the parents personally inviting them to participate in SEL engagement programs. Parents demonstrated an appreciation to the school for providing a variety of options to describe resources through group meetings, workshops, etc. (Wilkins & Terlitsky, 2016). Utilizing technology to record meetings and communicate also addresses barriers for parents unable to participate during the set times of the informational sessions (Sammons et al., 2015).

By having increased and meaningful communication between parents and the school, this indirectly demonstrates how to positively communicate that adolescents can learn from and use as a model in their own communications (Coppell, 2020). This effective communication can also address various external environment issues that may not have been known by the school due to a lack of communication (Davies et al., 2011). Once a school is informed of what barriers a family has in their external environment, the school can utilize incentives to increase participation in SEL programs once parents are engaged (Hernandez Rodriguez et al., 2020).

Research has indicated a dramatic increase in parental engagement when there are incentives for not only the students, but the parents as well (Levitt et al., 2016). In a study conducted by Hernandez Rodriguez et al. (2020), it was determined that incentives did not have significant effect on recruiting enrollment but did increase the quality of the participation. These incentives tried to meet basic needs such as transportation, food, and money in order to entice participation in a parenting program (Hernandez Rodriguez et al., 2020). Due to the limited

budget that schools have to spend on programs, limitations to incentive programs will exist unless other ways of funding the program exist (Dumas et al., 2010).

Volunteering. Parents can also engage with their child's school through volunteering for school-based programs and classroom activities (Mushtaq et al., 2012). Some of the most common ways that parents get involved are through more traditional means such as parent teacher conferences, volunteering in the school's parent teacher association (PTA), or assisting with classroom activities (Appiah-Kubi & Owusu, 2020). It has been found that parents that volunteer in reading programs greatly improve the learning outcomes of the students (Ni et al., 2021).

Parents volunteering in the school also create other positive benefits for the school community. One of the positive benefits that could occur is increased school safety due to strengthening social ties and improve the school climate (Hamlin & Li, 2020). Further studies suggest that, if advertised correctly, fathers are more willing to participate in school programs, which tends to have lower participation rates than mothers (Frank et al., 2015). This is especially true if the school can communicate the importance of all parents' participation and statistics as to why it will be impactful for their child's success.

Promoting home learning. Promoting learning at home is also an effective way for parents to engage with schools as they themselves help their child with the curriculum (Mustaq et al., 2012). Parents can do this by not only monitoring homework, but also helping the student to organize school activities and have expectations for the adolescent's progress in school (Lusse et al., 2019). Some parents unfortunately recognize their own academic limitations and are embarrassed when they are unable to support their child (Davies et al., 2011). A study conducted by Lehl et al. (2020) suggested the increased value of promoting learning at home in early years

to gain the most benefit from the parental interactions, but increasing the practice still had positive effects on student outcomes while in secondary school.

Technology can be a strong support for parents as they help their child engage in SEL activities. Even though overuse of technology can lead to negative effects on a child's social emotional growth, using it in partnership with the parent to promote learning together consequently showed significant improvements in growth (Sammons et al., 2015). The ability to create home engagement proved to be much more effective than any community clinic intervention (Pellechia et al., 2018). When looking at improving the external environment and providing one less barrier for students in their mental health, engaging parents in this process removes negative stimuli for the child to engage in their cognitive thought process (Schumaker et al., 2013).

Decision making opportunities. Allowing parents to be involved in the decision making process for policies also promotes family engagement in the school (Mushtaq et al., 2012). While not all parents are able to physically join committees, due to a variety of barriers, utilizing surveys allows parent's voices to be heard while developing policies that directly relate to their child's education and emotional health (Birch & Hallock, 1999). In a study conducted by Hornby and Blackwell (2018), most schools don't have official policies on how to get parent's involved in decision making of the school. In order to engage parents, educational institutions need to develop a plan for how to better provide opportunities for parents to offer suggestions and have a say in their child's education. This allows the relationship between parents and the school to improve as parents feel valued for their input (Watson et al., 2012).

Parents have desired to have a voice in their child's education from the inception of the U.S. educational system (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). The desire to provide insight for the community

and advocate for their children continues in the present educational system and has shown to provide significant benefits to student educational and emotional outcomes (Watson et al., 2020). As a way to offer parent input, schools can utilize parents on decision making committees to help guide policies directly related to their children (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Conducting yearly surveys also give parents an opportunity to share their input without having to navigate work schedules with in-person meetings (DeSpain et al., 2018).

Community engagement. Helping promote family engagement in the community also creates positive family bonds and increases involvement within school community programs (Mushtaq et al., 2012). This can be done through school activities where agencies from the local community are made available in one location and provide information and literature for families to save time and offer immediate information (DeSpain et al., 2018). One suggestion given by Birch and Hallock (1999), is to have members of the Health Department made available to families to provide resources, information, and guidance for parents.

Parents often express concerns that activities are not “family friendly”, meaning the timing of the event doesn’t accommodate parents that work a variety of hours (Davies et al., 2011). Schools that offer such events at various times of the day and alternative mediums (i.e. in-person, virtually, pre-recorded, etc.) allow for families to access the information and become involved in a way that works with their schedule. Parents of color are often expected to assimilate to a white, middle class model of becoming engaged due to the programs offered from a school (Yull et al., 2018).

Current practices in educational institutions focus on general parent participation programs such as parent teacher conferences, family informational nights, open houses, etc. (Appiah-Kubi & Owusu, 2020). Research suggests that this approach is not as effective as

targeting a specific niche for particular programs, such as parent engagement programs specifically for fathers to get involved with their child's school (Velez et al., 2020). Having particular social-emotional programs that utilize technology can help keep all parties engaged and offer support for families as they engage with the social-emotional focus (Sammons et al., 2015).

Summary

When developing educational programs to help increase the engagement of parents within SEL, grounding the work in theory increases the validity of the program and optimizes the ability to have positive results. The Social Cognitive Theory developed by Albert Bandura allows individuals to learn from past experiences and cognitively process the rationale of a current behavior (Bandura, 1977). The association between the individual's personal factors, the external environment, and the actual behavior are directly related as proven through reciprocal determinism (Smith, 2021). The personal factors focus on past experiences a client may have had that he/she relate to his/her current situation (Ginter & White, 1982). These experiences even engage the cognitive reasoning that one has during the event. This connects directly to the external environment of the individual, which is any external stimuli (Smith, 2021). The importance of the individual to limit negative stimuli helps the person process events effectively (Schmaker et al., 2013). Finally, the actual behavior occurs as the past experiences a person has endured is either heightened or dulled based on the environment the individual is in (Smith, 2021).

Working in conjunction with the Social Cognitive Theory is the effective use of emotion-focused therapy that focuses on the emotional response of the individual and how he/she understands this emotion (Angus, 2012). The use of emotion-focused therapy showed increased

results in improving responses to stress and decreasing shame (Haberman et al., 2019).

Recognizing limitations to how parents respond to emotions and what is taught in the home through a cultural lens can increase the effectiveness of emotion-focused therapy (Karakurt & Keiley, 2009).

While parental engagement varies in interpretation and view from the various stakeholders, Mushtaq et al. (2012) determined that parent engagement can be demonstrated through the home environment, effective communication between the school and home, volunteering opportunities, promoting learning at home, allowing parents a voice in policy decisions, and encouraging community participation. Building a positive environment for the adolescent with expectations and boundaries allowed for success in all areas of life (Mustaq et al., 2012). Due to the complex nature of the parent to adolescent relationship, a program that promotes forgiveness through emotion-focused therapy could help bridge that gap (Worthington & Scherer, 2004).

Having effective communication also helps enforce parent programs and increase the likeliness of the parents participating (Davies et al., 2011). Communicating the importance of parental programs but also incentivizing participation can help address the barriers parents face when trying to be involved (Hernandez Rodriguez et al., 2020). Parents can also become involved by physically joining activities or events around the school (Mustaq et al., 2012). This is the typical way parents utilize to become involved, but can be even more effective if schools target specific groups through advertisement instead of general announcements (Frank et al., 2015). Promoting learning at home creates a connection between the school and home environment (Lehrl et al., 2020). The use of technology can be used to help schools equip

parents to promote learning at home and has shown the opportunity to improve student outcomes (Sammons et al., 2015).

The final two engagement strategies are creating opportunities for parents to engage in decision making within the school and promoting community engagement (Mustaq et al., 2012). Creating opportunities for parents to make decisions helps the parents feel valued and improves the likelihood they will engage with school related activities (Watson et al., 2012). The use of surveys allows parents to provide insight and their expertise of their particular child (DeSpain et al., 2018). As parents and families engage with the community, and schools utilize their services, barriers that stop parents from participating are adequately address (Davies et al., 2011). As schools pinpoint specific individuals to participate, initial engagement increases and keeps families engaged long-term (Velez et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Based on the research, parents have a wide variety of opportunities to become engaged in their child's education. Schools must identify barriers in order to provide ample opportunities for parents to get involved and better support the growth of their child as they become a role model for positive behaviors (Bandura, 1977). This can be done with a targeted approach to increase participation in certain groups utilizing an evidenced-based Social Cognitive Theory to build upon child and family experiences to promote positive growth and focus on emotional growth. Giving incentives to families that participate increases the likelihood that families that normally wouldn't participate will engage with the program (Levitt et al., 2016). This project will focus on developing a program to address all forms of parental engagement, recognizing that not all families are identical and participate in the same way (Yull et al., 2018).

Chapter Three: Project Description

Introduction

The direct correlation between student success and parent engagement continues to be a major focus of all school stakeholders (Cureton et al., 2020). The issue schools continue to face is how to provide opportunities for all parents to become engaged, while navigating the plethora of barriers families face (Watson et al., 2012). This is increasingly necessary when looking for ways for parents to engage with their child's social-emotional health (McCormick et al., 2016). This project focuses on providing an outline for parents to become engaged in the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons to increase engagement in the child's education, while also attempting to navigate barriers that families may face. This project can also be used as a template for other school districts to promote parental engagement within SEL lessons. The project begins by detailing the objectives and explaining the various components needed for implementation of the program. The components include an initial parent meeting explaining the benefits of increased engagement in SEL lessons, expectations for participation in the incentive program, a calendar indicating the timeline of when the SEL topics will be covered, an initial parent survey and questionnaire, and sample lessons/activities parents can use to engage in their child's social-emotional health. Secondly, it will include the different ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Lastly, the project will describe the expected results, while acknowledging the limitations of the project.

Project Components

This project outlines various components to promote a parent engagement program that seeks to increase parental engagement in SEL activities within the home by providing the benefits of parental engagement and activities to promote improved family relationships. The

basis of these activities keep the engagement opportunities described by Epstein (1995) as a foundation of the program. In order to increase the authority of the program, Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory provides the framework behind recognizing current or potential problems and setting goals to improve the problem (Stone & Dahir, 2016). The project also builds upon key components utilized in emotion-focused therapy so the participants can make meaning of particular emotions they may have (Angus, 2012). When utilizing these approaches, parents are given an opportunity to actively engage and see positive growth within their student and the family dynamics (Suku et al., 2019).

Informational Meeting. The first component of the project will be to provide an informational meeting for all parents to explain the benefits of parental engagement in SEL activities. To address barriers for parents, the presentation will be recorded and posted on the school website for parents to participate at a time that is convenient for them. The slideshow (Appendix A) for the presentation will also be made available in a print-out version for families that would like a copy to reference. The content of the presentation will utilize research to inform parents on the importance of not only engaging in their child's educational activities but also the importance of participating in SEL activities at home. The beginning of the presentation will provide the specific research on this topic and the remainder of the meeting will give parents an opportunity to share insights and ask pertinent questions. The closing of the presentation will announce the parent participation incentive program (Appendix B). The integration of incentives has been found to increase the amount of participants, especially when the incentives meet various needs of the community (Levitt et al., 2016). Parents will also be given an explanation of the expectations of the project (Appendix C). These will be basic guidelines of how to structure the SEL activities in the home and how to demonstrate participation in the activities. After

completion of the parent informational meeting, parents will understand both the importance of participating in the program and also what the expectations are in order to participate.

Incentive Program. The incentive program will focus on providing rewards to help motivate participants while participating in the SEL activities at home. The goal is to provide incentives that address various barriers such as food, transportation, clothing, etc. Participation will be done by having families either take a photo of themselves participating in the activity or writing a brief summary of the activity they completed and submitting it to the school counselor. The school counselor can then keep track of the activities that a particular family completes and provide the incentive based on the incentive program scale. Immediate rewards will be earned by families once they reach certain markers. Families will also have the opportunity to be entered into a drawing that will be held at the end of the academic year with various prizes to be earned.

Activity Schedule. The second component details the social-emotional topics that will be covered during each timeframe for the school year, which varies from one month to several months. This will depend on the school calendar for scheduled breaks. A calendar depicting the specific topics (Appendix D) will be made available to parents to keep all stakeholders informed on what topics will be covered in the classroom. As indicated previously, parents have been engrained in the curriculum being taught to their children since colonial education started in America (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). By providing a calendar indicating the topics that will be covered, the project offers transparency of what parents should expect and allow opportunities for parents to determine what their family will focus on in terms of social-emotional development during in-home activities.

Sample Activities. The third component is two months of sample activities for specific topics (Appendix E) that can be used for implementation of the program. The sample activity

lists will depict an easy to follow format for families to participate throughout the month to provide flexibility for families. The activities that families will complete while participating in the program will be outlined for each SEL topic. Due to the positive impact of parents engaging in their child's school activities, the sample activities were designed to be done together and promote healthy family relationships (Watson et al., 2012).

The activity lists are also designed to be intentional in addressing the various types of engagement a parent can exhibit as originally outlined by Epstein (1995). One area of focus was promoting a healthy home environment that exhibits intentional communication between all parties (Mustaq et. al, 2012). The sample activities allow opportunities for families to engage with the specific topic through open-ended discussion questions after completing the activity. This approach will allow parents to both communicate their own experiences, but also listen to the experiences and beliefs of their child. Research indicates that children who believe they matter to their parents through active engagement in their lives, are less likely to suffer from mental health ailments (Velez et al., 2020).

Project Implementation

This project will be presented to the school's advisory council which consists of representatives from the school community including school counselors, administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in the school community. After approval from the school's advisory council, the project can be implemented within the school counseling comprehensive program as part of the SEL activities within the school curriculum. The school counseling department will work with students and families to assist in the implementation in the home and provide resources when needed. After one full academic year of implementing the program, the

results will be organized and presented to the advisory council in order to determine the effectiveness of the program and areas of growth for the program.

Project Evaluation

This project will be evaluated in two different ways. The first way this project will be evaluated will be through the initial parent survey (Appendix F) using a Likert five-point scale which will evaluate the initial beliefs of the parents on how effective the school is on providing engagement opportunities for parents to become involved in their child's SEL activities. The survey will also gauge the parents' current engagement with their child's social-emotional health using a five-point scale. After one year of implementing the program, parents will take a post-survey to determine the change in beliefs and change in engagement with their child's social-emotional health. The data will be calculated and presented to the advisory council to determine the effectiveness of the program.

The second way this project will be evaluated is through the amount of families that engage in the program by submitting evidence of participating in the SEL activities. The goal of the project is to increase opportunities for families to become engaged in SEL activities with their child and families submitting completed activities will demonstrate the number of families that participate. After one year of the project being implemented, this data will be presented to the advisory council. To compare a change in participation, a second year will be needed to determine the effectiveness.

Project Conclusions

The implementation of this project will effectively create an environment for parents to actively engage in their children's SEL and overall mental health. This will also empower parents as they navigate the complex lives of their child's social-emotional health, which

research indicates drastically reduces the overall stress of the child when they feel their parents are invested (Velez et al., 2020). While the anticipated results of this project indicate that parental engagement will increase, it is important to acknowledge the limitations to this project. Due to not having control over what happens outside of school hours and what occurs in the home, this project only provides opportunities and incentives for parents to engage. Constant evaluation of the effectiveness of the program will be used to determine appropriate changes needed to increase parental engagement.

This project creates opportunities for parents and allows schools to address the various barriers that make it difficult for parents to engage in their child's education through standard means. Creating flexible options for families allows parents to engage in a timeframe that works for their schedule, without having to navigate the fixed schedule that schools operate. As a direct result, the children will reap the benefits of having engaged parents in activities related to the school and their overall mental health and wellness.

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Appendix A: Parent Engagement Informational Presentation

Social-Emotional Learning at Home

Created by: Shawn Kiley

Benefits of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

- Helps decrease childhood depression (Jensen & Minke, 2017)
- Creates positive role models to use for guidance (Copell, 2020)
- Increases communication within the home between adolescents and parents (Davies et al., 2011)
- Allows opportunities for building positive relationships between the parent and child (Watson et al., 2012)
- Demonstrates a strong connection between the home and school (Wilkins & Terlitsky, 2016)

Created by: Shawn Kiley, 2021

Benefits of Parental Engagement in SEL

- Majority of adolescents long for parental closeness and investment in their lives (Velez et al., 2020)
- Increased sense of belonging in the school and family (Cureton et al., 2020)
- Adolescents learn how to navigate stress with an adult as a mentor (Copell, 2020)

Types of Engagement

- Creating a positive home environment
- Effective communication
- Volunteering
- Promoting learning at home
- Opportunities for decision making
- Community engagement

Addressing Barriers

- Major barriers are time constraints, lack of trust in the school, poor communication, and lack of understanding on how to get involved (Winnail et al., 2000)
- Lack of time is the main concern for most parents (Cureton et al., 2020)
- Financial responsibilities also create a barrier to allow parents to become engaged (McCormick et al., 2016)

Parental SEL Program

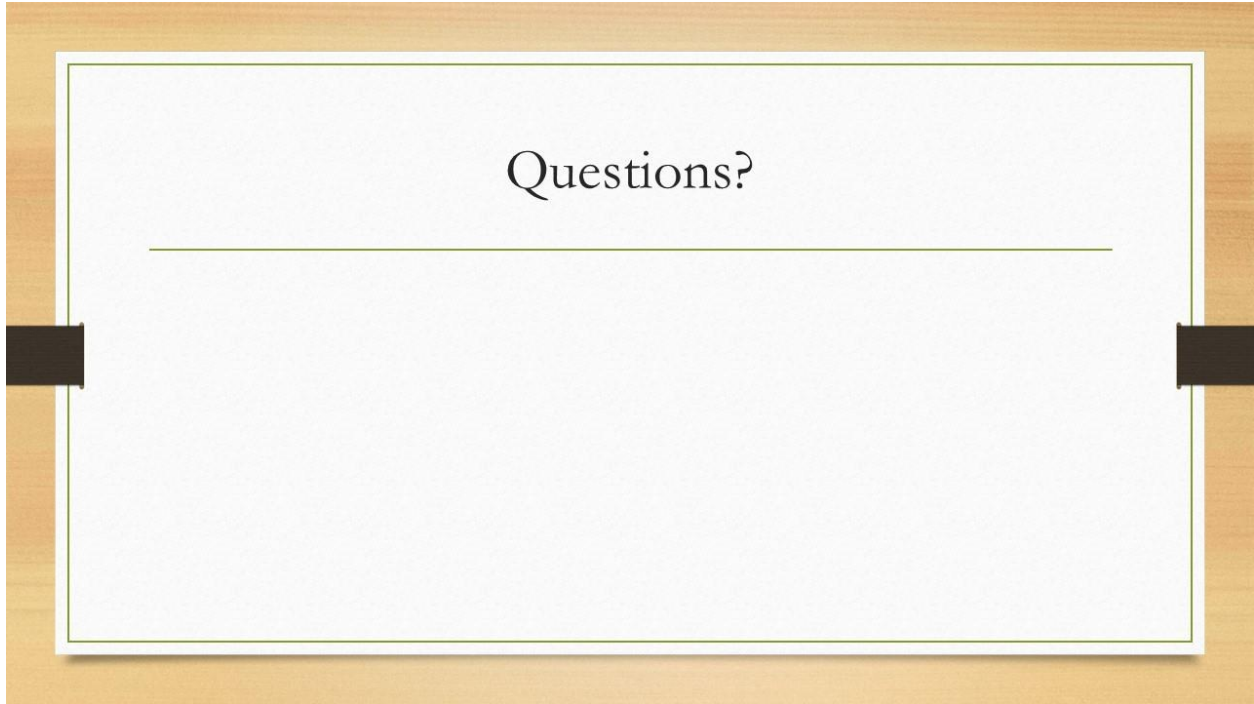
- We desire for parents to get involved and value the expertise of our parents.
- This program details specific activities that can be done as a family to promote the SEL topics being covered in the classroom.
- In order to create flexibility, families are given the option to perform however many activities they can at a time that is convenient.
- The goal of the program is to address barriers and provide support for our student and families

Incentive Program

- We value your participation!
- By participating and submitting either photo evidence of completing the activity or writing a short summary, your family will be entered into the incentive program.
- Most stages offer an immediate reward and a ticket for a drawing that will take place at the end of the year.
- Some exciting prizes that will be drawn for are gift certificates, gas cards, school apparel, etc.

Expectations

- #1 Be Intentional – When engaging in the various activities, try to make that activity the only activity you are working on.
- #2 Be Open-minded – Some activities may take you out of your comfort zone and we ask you to simply try.
- #3 Open Communication – Continue to communicate with us as we offer support for your family.
- #4 Be Respectful – Try to value the opinions of all family members participating.

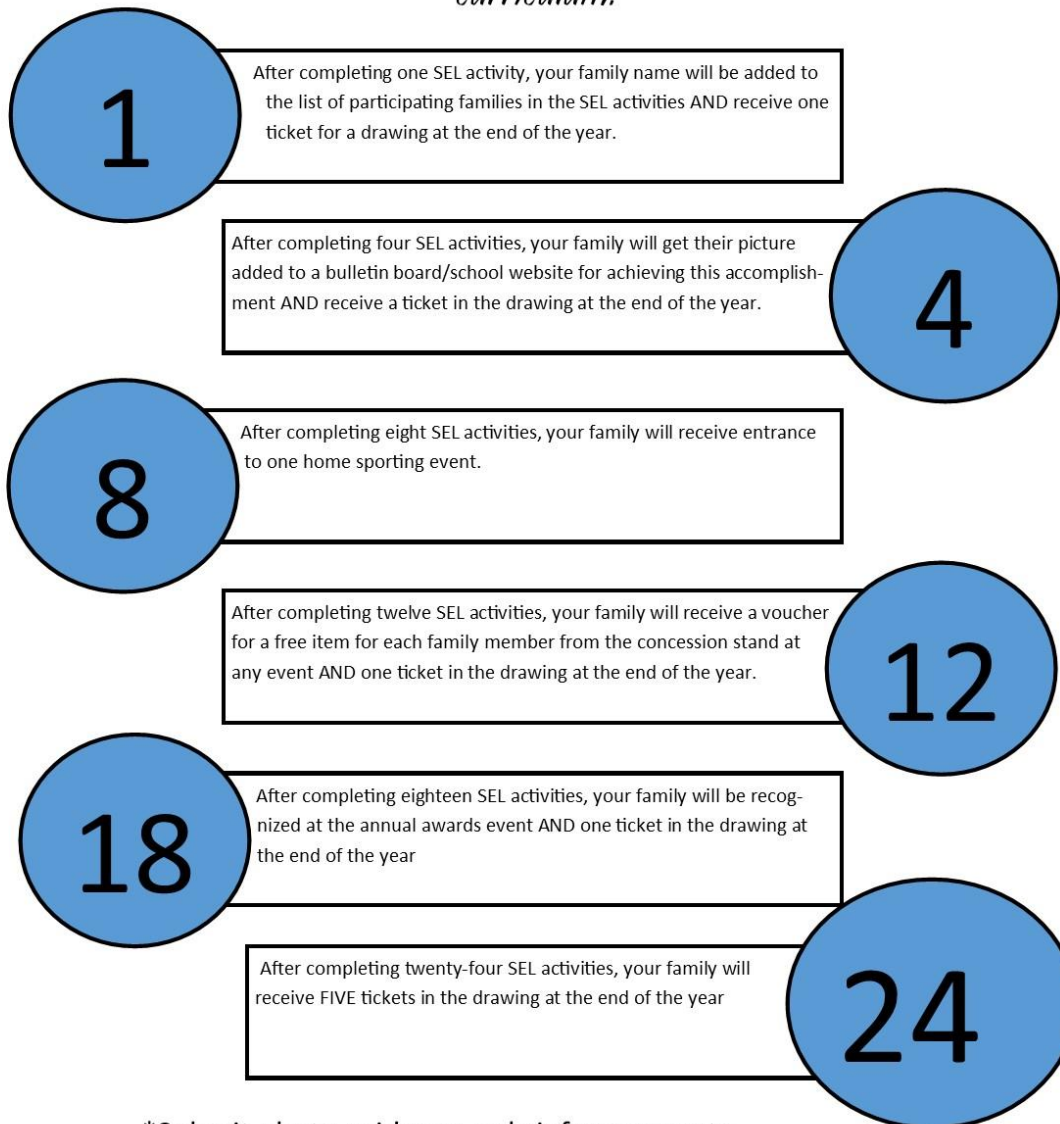


Created by: Shawn Kiley, 2021

Appendix B: Incentive Program

Participation Incentive Program

We want to recognize the continued efforts of our families and provide additional incentives for participating in the Social-Emotional Learning curriculum.



*Submit photo evidence or brief summary to...

Appendix C: Parental Engagement Expectations

Expectations

#1 Be Intentional

- *When engaging in the various activities, try to make that activity the only activity you are working on.*

#2 Be Open-minded

- *Some activities may take you out of your comfort zone and we ask you to simply try.*

#3 Open Communication

- *Continue to communicate with us as we offer support for your family.*

#4 Be Respectful

- *Try to value the opinions of all family members participating.*

Appendix D: Social-Emotional Learning Calendar

Social-Emotional Learning Calendar

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>SEPTEMBER Relationship Skills <i>- The ability to develop positive relationships with others</i></p> | <p>FEBRUARY Goal-Directed <i>- Reaching towards a specific goal while creating steps to reach that goal</i></p> |
| <p>OCTOBER Social Awareness <i>- Understanding the differences of others in a local and global community</i></p> | <p>MARCH Personal Responsibility <i>- Accept responsibility for one's behavior and actions.</i></p> |
| <p>NOVEMBER /DECEMBER Self Management <i>- Demonstrating the ability to take responsibility for one's behavior</i></p> | <p>APRIL Decision Making <i>- Learning how to make informed decisions</i></p> |
| <p>JANUARY Self Awareness <i>- Understanding one's own abilities and limitations</i></p> | <p>MAY /JUNE Optimistic Thinking <i>- Finding positive thoughts in trying times</i></p> |

Created by: Shawn Kiley

Created by: Shawn Kiley, 2021

Appendix E: Social-Emotional Learning Sample Home Activities

October

Social Awareness

Below is a list of suggested activities you and your child can do together throughout the month. Feel free to do as many as you would like. Remember to submit pictures/summaries to (skiley@...) and the more you do, the more prizes you can earn!

Watch the News

Gain insight of what is happening in the community and discuss what you learned as a family

Act of Kindness

Choose one act of kindness that you can do for another person.

Active Listening

Practice actively listening to someone while utilizing appropriate skills

Trading Places

Trade roles with someone for a day performing tasks they normally perform to gain a different perspective

Community Service

As a family, choose a way to make your community better (i.e. pick up trash, help a neighbor, etc.)

Discussion Questions

What did you learn about yourself?

What did you learn about others?

What feelings did you have when doing something for someone else?

What differences did you find while completing this activity?

What was your experience doing something you don't normally do?

What can you do differently in your life after completing this activity?

September

Relationship Building

Below is a list of suggested activities you and your child can do together throughout the month. Feel free to do as many as you would like. Remember to submit pictures/summaries to (skiley@...) and the more you do, the more prizes you can earn!

Family Game Night

Take time to play the favorite games of members in your family

Family Fun Day

Pick a day to spend as a family where a budget is discussed and activities are planned accordingly

Family Meal

Create a meal where all members of the family take a role

Child Teacher

Allow the children in the home to teach the parent(s) how to do something

Create Something

Take time to complete a project with your family to create something

Discussion Questions

What is something you learned about your family?

What did you learn about yourself?

What difficulties did you encounter?

What can you take from this experience?

How can these skills be used with your peers?

What leadership qualities did you notice in this activity?

Appendix F: Parent Survey

Initial Parent Survey
Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

I actively engage with my child's SEL activities in the home.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly*

I communicate effectively with my child.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly*

I feel supported by the school.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly*

I know what my child is learning in his/her SEL activities.

Hardly Ever 1 2 3 4 5 *Almost*

I know how to engage in my child's SEL education.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly*

I feel connected to the school community.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly*

I have time to participate in SEL activities in the home.

Hardly Ever 1 2 3 4 5 *Almost*

I discuss mental health with my child.

Hardly Ever 1 2 3 4 5 *Almost*

I am aware of my child's current mental health.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly*

Created by: Shawn Kiley, 2021

Final Parent Survey
Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

I actively engage with my child's SEL activities in the home.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly*

I communicate effectively with my child.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly*

I feel supported by the school.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly*

I know what my child is learning in his/her SEL activities.

Hardly Ever 1 2 3 4 5 *Almost*

I know how to engage in my child's SEL education.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly*

I feel connected to the school community.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly*

I have time to participate in SEL activities in the home.

Hardly Ever 1 2 3 4 5 *Almost*

I discuss mental health with my child.

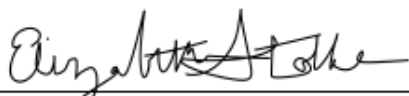
Hardly Ever 1 2 3 4 5 *Almost*

I am aware of my child's current mental health.

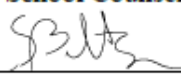
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly*



The signature of the individual below indicates that the individual has read and approved the project of Shawn Paul Kiley in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of School Counseling.



 Elizabeth Petroelje Stolle, Project Advisor 4/29/21

 Date

Accepted and approved on behalf of the
 Master of School Counseling Program


 Shawn Bultsma, Graduate Program Director
 04/29/2021

 Date

Accepted and approved on behalf of the
 EDC 693 Unit


 Catherine Meyer-Looze, Unit Head
 4/29/2021

 Date