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Establishing A Transformative Social Emotional Learning Evaluation Plan to Support All Students within a Targeted School District

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BACKGROUND

Social and emotional learning (SEL) refers to the process through which individuals acquire social and emotional competencies (Geesa et al., 2022). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) offers a framework to direct SEL programs, emphasizing five social and emotional competencies (CASEL, 2020): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making (Mahoney et al., 2020). When educational settings prioritize SEL, there is a positive impact on students, including improved academic performance, healthy relationships, and overall well-being (Geesa et al., 2022). For this reason, numerous curricula are available to promote the CASEL framework in K-12 educational settings (Cojocar, 2023). However, there is a significant disconnect between the available SEL curricula and the unique needs of different district schools. Within one specific district, there is a desire for programming that more inclusive and culturally responsive than current SEL curricula offers. Further, this same district desires programming that promotes executive function skills and ultimately academic tenacity (S. Pascal, personal communication, June 16, 2023). Hence, this district has endeavored to create their own transformative, comprehensive SEL program to match the district's unique context and foster positive change in SEL practices in classrooms, schools, families, and communities (S. Pascal, personal communication, June 16, 2023). In addition to the enormous task of developing an SEL curriculum for K-12 students, this district needs a comprehensive evaluation plan to monitor programming and outcomes (S. Pascal, personal communication, June 16, 2023).

PROBLEM

As the target school district develops a comprehensive and transformative SEL curriculum to meet the unique needs of their students, they also desire an equally comprehensive evaluation plan to determine the impact on students' performance, participation, and overall well-being.

PURPOSE

To develop a transformative Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Evaluation Plan to determine the impact on students' performance, participation, and overall well-being in a targeted school district.

METHODS

The target school district modified CASEL wheel to meet their unique needs by adding one additional competency skill (executive functioning) and potential outcomes (Williams & Jagers, 2020). Consequently, the evaluation plan was guided by this framework.



Project Initiation Phase

- Analyzed the strengths and opportunities of the targeted school district related to SEL programming.

Evaluation Plan Development Phase

- Reviewed Panorama Education results on student climate to inform the evaluation plan.
- Developed a draft evaluation plan for the SEL program.

Program Evaluation Dissemination Phase

- Refined and finalized the evaluation plan based on the feedback received.

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This project did not involve human subjects and did not require IRB approval.

EVALUATION PLAN CONTENT

Introduction

- District SEL Framework
- Priorities
 - Promotion of student agency
 - Holistic student development
 - Creation of safe and equitable environments

Collaborative Data Sources

- Teachers
- Students
- School administrators

Data Collection Methods

- Assessment of current practices
- Surveys and questionnaires
- Observational assessments
- Focus groups and interviews
- School records reviews

Data Collection Cycle

- Beginning of the year
- Mid-year
- End of the year

Data Analysis Strategies

- Pre- and Post-Implementation Data Charts
- Demographics Comparative Data Charts
- Implementation Progression Charts

DISCUSSION

This project has contributed strategies for SEL in an educational setting through a comprehensive and transformative evaluation plan. The key contributions are:

- Aligns SEL program with educational standards
- Initiates collaboration with stakeholders for informed decisions-making
- Provides regular evaluation cycles in the district
- Defines measurable criteria for program success
- Provides a scalable and applicable evaluation plan

Implications for OT

This project highlights the unique contribution that OT practitioners can make to SEL program implementation and evaluation; such as:

- Integration of transformative SEL into therapeutic practices
- Holistic student development
- Advocacy for student agency
- Collaboration with educational professionals

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