Social Emotional Learning: Role of the School Counselor in Promoting College and Career Readiness

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This manuscript will address the significance for school counselors to integrate social emotional learning into their counseling programs in order to promote and foster a college and career ready atmosphere. Social emotional learning involves people obtaining and implementing knowledge, affect, and skills / abilities in order to manage emotions, achieve strength-based goals, show empathy, create healthy relationships, as well as make healthy choices. The five core competencies that embody social emotional learning include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills. In addition to ensuring that students' possess hard technical skills in order to be academically proficient and successful, school counselors are also encouraged to integrate social emotional learning components into their comprehensive counseling program to promote college and career readiness. It is imperative that upon graduation, all students are able to communicate, solve problems, resolve conflicts, regulate their emotions, manage time and stress, possess motivation, zest, optimism, as well as leadership skills, as these core skills are paramount in helping them to be college and career ready, as well as productive members of society at large.

Keywords: school counselors, social emotional learning, college and career readiness

INTRODUCTION

Social emotional learning (SEL) is the process by which people acquire, obtain, and execute the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are needed to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, demonstrate empathy, build and maintain happy and healthy relationships, and make sound choices (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). The overarching purpose of this paper is to address the significance of social emotional learning, as well as the importance for school counselors to integrate social emotional learning into their curricula in order to help students be academically, personally, socially, and emotionally successful both in school, as well as in their post-secondary endeavors. Social emotional learning enables students to be more prepared for college and post-secondary workforce endeavors, as students who possess these skills are better able to resolve conflict, communicate, take on leadership roles, assume responsibility / accountability, are more able to manage time and stress, problem solve, have a more optimistic mindset, as well as are able to collaborate and work efficiently with others, which is critical to productivity and efficiency. School counselors are strongly encouraged to integrate social emotional learning components into their comprehensive counseling programs to ensure that students possess strong leadership, collaboration, problem solving, communication, academic, personal / social, vocational, and interpersonal skills that are vital for their post-secondary success (ASCA, 2012).

School counselors are encouraged to create a school climate that is safe, rigorous, inclusive, engaging, and promotes success for all students. Research substantiates that healthy schools and supportive school environments help to provide students with connectivity, support, engagement, safety, as well

as access to social capital and resources necessary for growth (Berg, Osher, Moroney, & Yoder, 2017). The National School Climate Council (NSCC) defines a school climate as a, 'pattern of school life experiences and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning, leadership practices, and organizational structures (NSCC, 2004). In order to create safe and inclusive learning climates counselors can integrate social and emotional learning in order to help promote the health development, feelings of physical safety, connectedness, support, and engagement amongst students and stakeholders (Osher, Cantor, Berg, Rose, & Steyer, 2017). School climate involves having policies, norms, expectations, a positive school environment that motivates students to reach their fullest potential, partnerships with families and the community at large along with frequent and open communication between all stakeholders. Certain conditions need to exist in order to promote learning and social development of students including creating schools that are engaging, promote connectedness, emphasize safety and cultural responsiveness, highlight collaboration, communication, inclusion, challenges students, as well as having stakeholders model and reinforce competencies (Osher et al., 2017).

Social Emotional Learning Competencies

Social emotional learning is composed of five competencies including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Each competency is described in greater detail below.

Self-Awareness. Accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, strengths, areas for growth, and exuding self-confidence and belief in one self. A key component of self-awareness is being able to recognize and conceptualize emotions, as well as the causes and triggers of them (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Self-awareness also includes having an understanding of one's own emotions and values, as well as assessing one's strengths, thoughts, feelings and actions and how each are interconnected (Weissberg, 2016). Self-awareness highlights one's intrinsic motivation and levels of self-pride when goals are attained. This skill relates to one's self-efficacy; the belief that one has that he or she can achieve his or her fullest potential (Bandura, Babaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001).

Self-Management. Being able to regulate one's emotions, handle stress, and control impulses and delay gratification (Weissberg, 2016). Self-management is a critical skill to possess, as it enables people to persevere, work to overcome challenges, as well as manage emotions in an appropriate way (Gullone, Hughes, King, & Tonge, 2010). Students who possess this skill are better able to cope with stress, manage their emotions, and have been found to experience an easier transition to college, as well as achieve higher academic performance in comparison to peers who lack this skill (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004).

Social Awareness. Taking the perspective of and empathizing with others who may differ from you, as well as appreciating others' and their differences. This entails the ability to understand, empathize, and feel compassion from those who have different backgrounds and or ideologies (Weissberg, 2016). One fundamental aspect of social awareness of to be able to respect and celebrate others' perspectives in various social interactions and settings, which promotes pro-social behavior (Decety, 2009). Further, social awareness allows people to recognize situations in which social support is vital in regards to conflict resolution and problem solving. For instance, having peer support and having study groups may help college students understand concepts from other perspectives, learn material, and promote greater academic success.

Relationship Skills. Includes maintaining healthy and cooperative relationships, fostering connectivity, increasing social support and college retention (Mattanah, Ayers, Brand, Brooks, Quimby, & McNary, 2010), preventing interpersonal conflict, and working through conflict peacefully when needed. Relationship skills help students build and maintain health relationships, act in

accordance to social norms, as well as communicate, actively listen, cooperate, negotiate conflict, and seek assistance when needed (Weissberg, 2016). Additionally, relationship skills help students to work better collaboratively and with those from diverse backgrounds. Relationship skills also help students to build support networks, as well as encourages students to seek out help when needed in order to obtain academic, personal, social, and vocational guidance.

Responsible Decision Making. Refers to making healthy decisions based upon considering ethical standards, morals, social norms, respect for others, choice making, considering advantages and disadvantages, as well as ramifications of actions. This involves learning how to make constructive choices about personal behaviors and social interactions across various settings. It requires those to consider ethical standards, safety, norms, and being able to weigh out consequences of choices (Weissberg, 2016). According to Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010), schools can teach social and emotional skills following the acronym SAFE including: 1) Sequenced: Connected and coordinated sets of activities that promote skill development. 2) Active: Active forms of learning that are experiential and help students learn and practice new skills. 3) Focused: Emphasis on developing personal and social skills. 4) Explicit: Targeting specific social and emotional learning skills. Responsible decision-making skills are imperative for graduates to entail, as they will have more independence, responsibility, and autonomy post-graduation and will be expected to make healthy choices in their best interest and others' best interest, regardless of their new-found freedom.

Importance of Social and Emotional Learning

Social emotional learning skills have a strong relationship with student success across the board (Weissberg, 2016). Social emotional learning allows students to succeed academically, personally, socially, and professionally, as well as experience feelings of connectedness, inclusion, engagement, challenge, and motivation within the school setting. Students who possess social emotional learning skills are more likely to pursue post-secondary endeavors and less likely to drop out. Data has shown that students who face barriers that prevent them from excelling in school and life are more likely to engage in at risk behaviors including drug usage, violence, bullying, and risky sexual behaviors (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2011).

According to a survey conducted in 2012, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that only 74.9% of high school students graduate with a diploma in the United States. There are over 3 million public school students who dropped out of high school in 2011 (Education Week, Children Trends Database, 2012). In order to help mitigate dropout rates and promote graduation, as well as post-secondary endeavors, school counselors are encouraged to integrate social emotional learning into their curriculum to better help students' problem solve, set realistic goals, experience empowerment, enhanced confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership skills so students feel equipped and prepared to enter college or the workforce upon graduation. Through providing students with social emotional learning skills, as well as developing a safe, challenging, future focused, caring, respectful, culturally sensitive, celebratory, inclusive, and experiential climate, school counselors can teach and students can learn these vital skills that can help them complete school, graduate, and lead productive lives; always striving to make a positive impact and difference. Social emotional learning skills have been shown to improve factors known to help students through college including growth mindsets (helping them recognize that skills can be enhanced and are not fixed), as well as promote optimism, motivation, self-control and school completion (American Institutes for Research, 2013).

Through integrating social and emotional learning school wide, in classrooms, and small groups, school counselors can use their platform and abilities to enlighten, inspire, mentor, guide, and empower students to learn life skills that are instrumental to their personal, social, and professional success. Social and emotional learning helps students to better manage themselves, understand the perspectives of others and relate to them, as well as assists them in making healthy choices about

personal and social situations. According to Durlak et al., (2011), students who possess social emotional learning skills have more positive attitudes towards themselves and others, have greater self-efficacy, confidence, connectedness, more positive social behaviors with peers and adults, fewer behavioral issues, reduced emotional distress, and have higher test scores, grades, and attendance.

School Counselors: Best Practices for Incorporating SEL to Promote College & Career Readiness

School counselors are change agents, liaisons, advocates, leaders and collaborators who work tirelessly in order to promote the academic, social / emotional, and vocational success of all students. Due to their visibility and connectivity to key stakeholders, school counselors play a pivotal role in working with students to make sure they possess both the academic, as well as social emotional skills necessary to be successful in school and in life. There are several ways in which school counselors can incorporate social emotional learning into their counseling program. In order to ensure that all students are college and career ready, counselors are encouraged to create a school climate that promotes rigor, engagement, inclusion, celebrates cultural differences, fosters cultural responsiveness, is strengths based, empowering, inspiring, and helps students reach their fullest holistic potential. Counselors need to ensure that students receive SEL skills in order to facilitate a smoother transition into post-secondary endeavors, as well as collaborate with teachers and administrators addressing the importance of integrating SEL into curricula. Counselors can also work with teachers and administrators on gathering data on SEL programs, as well as the impact of the programs on student outcomes.

Social Emotional Learning: School Counselors Integrating School Wide Programs

It is essential for school counselors to integrate social emotional learning into curricula in that these competencies assist students in higher order thinking, employability skills, organization, teamwork, life skills, and problem solving. Social emotional learning skills can help students enhance their communication skills, become more resilient and encourage them to advocate for themselves through assertiveness skills learned (Battistich and Solomon, 2004). SEL has shown to promote academic achievement, positive attitudes towards school, decrease emotional distress, truancy, bullying, and delinquent behaviors (Zins, Weissberg, Want, & Walberg, 2004). According to literature, SEL in conjunction with character education and prevention programs developed to enhance social skills has shown to improve students social emotional learning skills, their attitude towards self and others, promote pro-social behaviors, academic performance, and decrease stress, as well as improve test scores by 11% (Durlak et al., 2011). In regards to school wide programs, counselors can work to implement programs addressing character education, social skill building, social emotional learning skills, as well as celebrating diversity by helping students to further develop their self-awareness, social awareness, as well as decision making skills in the school setting.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL, 2017) has developed evidence based programs that integrate social emotional learning skills such as No Place for Hate, which emphasizes the importance of having a safe and inclusive school climate with a zero tolerance policy for bullying, as well as assertiveness, emotion regulation, and empathy lessons that teach students about the importance of treating others how we want to be treated, to be in control of behaviors, to think before we act and control impulses, as well as to advocate for those being treated disrespectfully in order to ensure that all students feel supported at school. Additionally, the Anti-Defamation League created a program known as the Diversity Institute, in which culture is addressed, discussed, and integrated into lessons in order to empower and educate students and their parents about the importance of involvement, cultural responsiveness, and sensitivity. Students are trained to become student ambassadors who set a positive example as role models for other students, as well as work diligently to help create a school

culture that is tolerant, accepting, and celebratory of similarities and differences amongst key stakeholders.

Further, Dr. Botvin's Life Skills Program (Botvin, 2017) is an evidence-based program addressing substance usage, in which social emotional learning is integrated through teaching students coping skills, problem solving, ways to assert oneself, dealing with peer pressure, demonstrating resilience, as well as advocating for one self to not get involved with substance usage due to short- and long-term consequences. Creating positive and safe school climates is important for students behavioral and mental health outcomes (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Counselors, teachers, and administrators play a vital role in fostering positive climates, developing norms, values, and high expectations for all.

Social Emotional Learning: School Counselors Conducting Classroom Guidance

Counselors can provide training to students and teachers in the classroom setting about creating safe and supportive classroom climates and enhancing peer-to-peer relationships. The National Center of Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE) is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students and helps develop information for students and stakeholders that address safe classroom climates, as well as inform students about the dangers of bullying, violence, and substance usage (College and Career Readiness & Student Success Center, 2013).

School counselors can also integrate the RULER approach (Rivers & Brackett, 2011), which teaches students and stakeholders ways to recognize, understand, label, and express, and regulate emotions in order to promote student outcomes. The RULER Program encourages students to listen, learn, and consider how emotions impact their learning.

Moreover, Check & Connect (Check & Connect Student Engagement Intervention, Institute on Community Integration, 2018) is another SEL program that has been created for at-risk students who demonstrate signs of disengagement and pair them with a mentor. The program focuses on building trusting relationships, increasing problem solving, as well as perseverance and resilience. The program enables counselors to monitor student absences, referrals, and grades, as well as allows counselors to provide supports and resources to parents and families to promote engagement and involvement and decrease dropout rates.

Additionally, The Leader in Me Program (2018) is a SEL based program that teaches students about accountability, leadership, identifying and building upon strengths, as well as creating rewarding relationships. Students can improve their self-awareness, social awareness, enhance relationship skill building, as well as ways in which they can take on leadership roles in the classroom and schools to promote positive systemic change.

Furthermore, Lions Quest Skills for Action (2016) is a program that integrates SEL components into curricula and addresses employability skills in order to promote students post-secondary readiness. Students learn about career preparation, setting and achieving goals, as well as teamwork. Using this program, students have the opportunity to carry out community service projects in order to apply knowledge and skills obtained.

In addition, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP, 2016) is a bullying and violence prevention program that can be implemented in all classrooms, as well as individually, at the school, as well as community level. Holding meetings with students and parents of students involved in bullying, developing intervention plans, having classroom and school rules against bullying, as well as classroom meetings to discuss appropriate behaviors and expectations for an inclusive and tolerant school.

In order to students to enhance their social and emotional learning skills, counselors and teachers need to provide students with opportunities to practice skills attained. Teachers and counselors can integrate social and emotional learning into lessons and then have students practice the skills learned throughout the day. Social emotional learning can be integrated into their subject matter and encourage students to work in small groups settings in order to enhance their interpersonal and collaboration skills. Through building positive relationships with students, counselors and teachers can then model competencies for students, which augments student engagement through applying and practicing competencies (Williford & Sanger Wolcott, 2015). Counselors and teachers can work together to provide students with opportunities to share, experience autonomy, and master experiences that increase engagement, learning, and student outcomes (Williford & Sanger Wolcott, 2015).

Social Emotional Learning: School Counselors Conducting Small Groups

In addition, to facilitating classroom guidance discussing social and emotional learning and its direct relationship to college and career readiness, counselors can also facilitate small group counseling addressing topics such as decision making, conflict resolution, social skill building, leadership, optimism and zest, time and stress management, communication, accountability, empathy, and collaboration. Each will be discussed in greater detail below.

Decision making. School counselors can facilitate decision-making groups for students who are struggling to make the healthiest choices, which is a necessary skill to possess in order to be successful both in school, as well as in the workforce. Counselors can help students make positive choices by encouraging them to utilize decision trees in order to map out potential outcomes, as well as logical consequences in which they ask, 'Tell me what may happen if you do this and tell me what may happen if you do not do this?' Logical consequences help students to consider potential ramifications and consequences of their choices. School counselors can also have students work collaboratively and pose a case study, which requires students to communicate, consult, and brainstorm various ways they can resolve the situation being addressed. Students can also sift through hypothetical situations in a dyad and identify which choices are positive and which are negative. Students can also complete a lesson titled, 'My Magic Wand Choices' in which they are asked to record three healthy choices they would like to make this week, as well as use a magic wand to discuss how these choices can potentially impact their future. Having strong decision-making skills is imperative for students in regards to college and career readiness, so when faced with difficult decisions, students are prepared and know how to methodically make the decision that is best and healthiest for them.

Conflict resolution. Counselors can also facilitate groups addressing conflict resolution, a lifelong skill, as students need to be mindful of healthy ways to overcome conflict and problem-solve to achieve a win-win outcome. In order to enhance conflict resolution skills, counselors can ask students to role play a situation and work together to think about ways to overcome the problem in a healthy manner such as talking, actively listening, validating, understanding, and negotiating, rather than using aggressive means. Counselors can also discuss with students emotions and help them to identify the emotions that they experience when in conflict, as well as healthy ways to cope with these emotions. School counselors can also help teach students calm down strategies such as deep breathing, meditation, mindfulness, keeping post-its at their desk to remind them of positive ways to cope with conflict, using a mind jar, as well as reframing negative thoughts into positive ones in order to see things from a more positive and optimistic perspective. Students can also complete an activity called 'Conflict Box' in which they cut out images on a worksheet that indicate positive ways to deal with conflict including using 'I Messages', talking things out, listening attentively, reaching an agreement, as well as teaching others with respect. Students can also complete an activity that requires them to record the emotions they experience when in conflict, scale the intensity of the emotion experienced, ways they express their emotions when in conflict, as well as ways they can improve the way they

respond to conflict and resolve issues. Having strong conflict resolution skills is vital for college and career readiness, in that post-graduation students will work with people who have different work styles and approaches than they do and still have to get the job done. By teaching students conflict resolution skills, students will be better able, more confident, and more willing to work through and negotiate with others in order to achieve a win-win outcome.

Social skill building. School counselors can facilitate social skill building groups in order to help students improve their social skills and build healthy peer relationships so that they will be able to excel in school, as well as in post-secondary endeavors. School counselors can address topics including self-awareness, friendship, sharing common interests, conversation starters, conversation skills, and appropriate social cues. Social skill building is imperative, as students and adults of all ages need to possess strong social skills in order to be successful in school and in life. Social skill building enables students to enhance their collaboration, communication, listening, tattling vs. reporting, having personal space and boundaries, staying on topic, teamwork, perspective taking, expressing anger in healthy ways, teamwork and problem solving, self-control, understanding, as well as assertiveness skills so that they can build and maintain healthy relationships with peers and colleagues. Students can complete an activity such as, 'Social Skills Superhero' in which they draw themselves as superheroes, indicate their superpower, as well as how they can use their superpower to help others and be a good friend. Students can also attend a lunch bunch with the counselor and discuss any topic that they would like with group consensus that would be relevant and beneficial to all participants. Having strong social skills is critical for students in regards to college and career readiness, as social skills will help students enhance their communication, interpersonal, listening, and perspective taking which is imperative for school and work place success.

Leadership. School counselors can facilitate small groups addressing leadership skills so that students build and augment their confidence, communication, assertiveness, motivation, and goal setting skills. Counselors and students can address qualities that leaders possess, attributes of an effective leader, the importance of having a growth mindset and continuously striving to be the best they can be, as well as the importance of valuing one self and others. Students can complete an activity such as creating a bulletin board addressing ways in which bosses and leaders differ. Students can also complete a iLeader Kit in which students place materials in a Ziplock bag that represent leadership qualities such as a glue stick, which represents keeping a team together in a cohesive and unified manner. Having strong leadership skills is essential for students' college and career readiness success in that students will feel more empowered, be more willing to take initiative, have experience taking on leadership roles, as well as be mindful of the qualities that effective leaders possess so that they are able to utilize these skills in the real world in order to reach their fullest potential.

Optimism and zest. School counselors can facilitate groups on optimism and zest and discuss with students the importance of having a positive mindset, seeing challenges as teachable moments, as well as the significance of making the best out of every situation. Counselors can also discuss the importance of having a growth mindset and recognizing that skills can be improved via exposure and practice. Students can complete activities including stating positive affirmations each day in the mirror based upon intrinsic qualities such as, 'I am courageous and I can do this…', as well as creating vision boards that allow students to consider short and long term academic and professional goals. Vision boards are effective tools to use with students to promote the importance of optimism, as they epitomize the mantra seeing leads to believing leads to achieving; when we visualize our goals we are then more likely to believe that they are feasible to achieve and take steps to make our goals a reality. Counselors can also have students provide reframes to negative self-criticisms, as a way to help them foster a more positive mindset. Teaching students about optimism and zest is important for college and career readiness, in that having a positive mindset will help students to overcome adversity and obstacles, as well as motivate them to persevere, rise above, and continue until all of their goals are

achieved. It is essential to teach students about finding a silver lining, as every life experience, good, bad and indifferent, teaches us about ourselves and our resilience. Students who are resilient are better equipped to make it through difficult times and become stronger, wiser, more competent, better able to cope, and more able to manage stress as a result (Cassidy, 2015).

Time and stress management. Time and stress management are critical skills for students to possess in order to do well in school, as well as in their post-secondary endeavors. Students need to be mindful of the importance of prioritizing, efficiency, planning, management, as well as develop healthy coping skills to use to help them handle stress. Counselors can discuss with students their personal stressors, triggers of stress, current coping skills, as well as other ways they can better manage time and stress. Counselors can discuss short- and long-term consequences of stress if it is not managed appropriately. An activity students can complete is a stress assessment in order to obtain baseline data as to their level of stress and ways to mitigate their stress. Students can also create stress balls using balloons, flour, funnel, and Sharpee to draw a peaceful emoticon with that they can squeeze when experiencing stress. Counselors can discuss the importance of recording deadlines, due dates, having a schedule, organization, accountability, as well as healthy ways to cope with stress such as talking, exercising, art therapy, music therapy, deep breathing, or guided imagery. Having strong time and stress management skills is critical for college and career readiness in that students are going to have a myriad of responsibilities that need to be completed in a timely manner. Through learning time and stress management skills, students will be more efficient, productive, demonstrate less procrastination, and be more proactive in school and in life.

Accountability. School counselors can facilitate small groups addressing accountability, which is an imperative life skill for students to possess in order to be successful in college and in the workforce. It is important for students to take ownership of their actions, behaviors, choices, thoughts, and feelings rather than placing blame on others. Students need to learn to reflect and look at their role in a situation; what was positive and what was negative, as what as what can be done differently moving forward. All life experiences are teachable moments and we walk away stronger, wiser, and more aware as a result. School counselors can discuss using 'I Messages' in order to encourage students to take ownership of their feelings. 'I feel (emotion) when you (behavior of other person) because. 'I Messages' are powerful tools to use, as they allow students to express themselves in an assertive and empowering manner. Activities students can complete include an accountability jar, in which they use a plastic jar to decorate with words that reflect accountability and on popsicle sticks record ways in which they can demonstrate greater accountability. The Flip Flop Mistakes activity allows students to record on flip flop cut outs the mistakes they have made on one flip flop and on the other flip flop, ways that they have learned as a result of the mistake and how the experience promoted growth. Having strong accountability skills is paramount for college and career readiness, in that accountability helps us to be more responsible, reflective, and autonomous. Students who possess strong accountability are better able to take ownership rather than deflecting, recognize strengths and areas that necessitate improvement, as well as communicate their feelings in a more direct manner. Additionally, students who are accountable become active participants in their own success, create learning targets, steps they can take to reach those targets, feel greater ownership, empowerment, and are in control of making changes in order to help overcome academic shortcomings (Graham, 2017).

Empathy. Small groups addressing empathy are paramount to facilitate, as empathy is an instrumental skill that students need to be success for college and career readiness. Feeling how someone else is feeling and being able to imagine and put oneself in another's position is a very powerful skill that promotes friendship building, understanding, perspective taking, collaboration, problem solving, decision, making, effective leadership and optimism. An activity students can complete is 'Walking in My Shoes', in which they have cutouts of shoes and in each shoe they write about one challenge / source of adversity they are facing. Peers listen to the story and indicate ways in which that student can

cope with and overcome their challenge. This activity helps to normalize, as well as bond students closer together. Shoes can be laminated and hung up in the counseling office as a way to remind students to be non-judgmental, accepting, empathic, and open-minded. Students can also complete an empathy acronym activity in which next to each letter EMPATHY, they record one way staring with a letter that they can demonstrate empathy. For instance, 'E': Express understanding in regards to a struggle one is going through. In order to make growth in life personally and professionally, we need to be able to validate others' perspectives and be able to experience and give credence to the emotions they are feeling in a given situation. Possessing strong empathy skills is imperative for college and career readiness in order to help students connect with future peers and colleagues, have greater understanding, perspective taking, compassion, and ability to relate to others. Relationship building in school and in the workplace is fundamental for productivity, efficiency, and overall success. According to the National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE), those employees who are able to set and achieve goals, engage in teamwork, creatively problem solve and demonstrate empathy for others are highly successful at work (NACE 2018).

Collaboration. School counselors can also conduct groups addressing the importance of collaboration, working with others who may share differing perspectives, as well as teamwork. In order to have growth potential in school and in the workforce students must be able to work with others efficiently and effectively regardless of differences. Collaboration can entail peer-to-peer interaction or small group interaction. Collaboration helps to enhance SEL skills including communication, higher order thinking, emotion regulation, self-awareness, self-management, teamwork, listening, empathy, problem solving, decision-making, and time management. Students can complete various activities including role-plays, team building exercises such as two truths and a lie, or experiential group assignments such as presentations or case studies that require interaction and engagement from all participants. Students can also complete an activity such as, 'Saving Herbert', in which they use paper clips, a plastic cup, and a gummy fish and work together without verbally communicating (only using hand gestures) ways to get the fish out of the empty cup and on to the paper clip to be rescued. This activity requires full participation, engagement, collaboration, and effort from all group members. Having strong collaboration skills are imperative for students' in regards to college and career readiness, in that students need to be mindful of how to work in a group setting, listen to, validate, understand, and demonstrate respect even if they do not necessarily agree. Students must be able to collaborate and work in a group setting with those who are similar and different, in order to get the job done and do it well. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), being able to collaborate, build collaborative relationships with colleagues and others from different cultures, and those that have differing viewpoints, is essential in order to manage conflict and be productive at work (NACE, 2018).

Social Emotional Learning: School Counselors Conducting Individual Sessions

Counselors are encouraged to meet with students individually, especially those who display at-risk tendencies in order to engage them, form connectivity, as well as redirect destructive behaviors and help students replace unhealthy behaviors with healthy ones. During individual counseling sessions in addition to addressing academic concerns, counselors can work with students on time and stress management, emotion regulation and impulsivity control, decision making, problem solving, anger management, assertiveness, accountability, motivation, positivity, as well as ways to enhance their social and communication skills to promote healthier relationships. Through improving social emotional learning skills, students will be more successful academically, be better able to stay on task, experience less stress, feel more in control and empowered (Graham, 2017), be better able to communicate with peers, parents, teachers, and administrators, as well as take on roles that necessitate engagement and leadership in order to foster connectivity and inclusion.

DISCUSSION

This manuscript addresses the strong impactful relationship that exists between social emotional learning and college and career readiness. Those students who possess social emotional skills including leadership, communication, time and stress management, emotion regulation, conflict resolution, motivation, optimism, and empathy are more successful both academically, as well as professionally upon graduation. School counselors have the unique opportunity to work closely with teachers, administrators, parents and the community at large and work to integrate social emotional learning skills into their comprehensive counseling program in order to create a college and career going school climate that empowers, motivates, and inspires students to reach their fullest potential. This manuscript reinforces the fact that just as hard technical skills are vital for student success, their social emotional skills are also imperative in regards to efficiency, quality, timeliness, interpersonal relationships, connectivity, engagement, and humanity in school, the workplace, and the world. Counselors can integrate social emotional learning skills into school wide approaches, classroom guidance, small groups, as well as individual counseling to ensure that students are equipped and prepared for their post-secondary enterprises.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, school counselors play an integral role in ensuring that students possess the social emotional learning skills necessary to be successful academically, as well as professionally. Social emotional learning is composed of life skills and competencies including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making that are necessary ingredients for personal and professional growth. In addition to their many responsibilities ensuring student success academically, personally / socially and vocationally, being leaders, advocates, change agents, liaisons, collaborators, consultants, and overall warriors, school counselors are strongly encouraged to integrate social emotional learning into their curricula to make sure that all students have exposure, resources, knowledge, and are enlightened about the importance of possessing these skills, as they are transformational and the key to academic, personal / social, and vocational goal achievement. Beyond academics, is one's ability to connect to, listen to, inspire, empower, validate, work with, negotiate and compromise, lead, speak, motivate, identify strengths, set goals, and be collaborative team players. These skills can be taught, learned, enhanced and improved via practice and time. Teaching social emotional learning skills as school counselors can be one of the greatest gifts we can pay forward to our students to help them work towards self-actualization, productivity, fulfillment, and being their best selves both academically, but most importantly, as individuals who strive for excellence always in all ways.

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