

Social and Emotional Learning in the School Cafeteria



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BACKGROUND

- 1 out of 7 children in the US are food insecure and uncertain where their next meal will come from.¹ Children who experience food insecurity are at a higher risk for chronic disease, poor mental health, poor academic performance, and unfavorable health behaviors in adulthood.²⁻⁵
- Encouraging school meal participation and creating a positive cafeteria environment are two extremely important strategies to limit effects of child food insecurity.⁶⁻¹²
- Research shows that school-wide Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies help improve academic performance, reduce conduct problems, promote positive social behavior and lower emotional distress.^{9, 13-17}

RATIONALE

The cafeteria should be treated as a learning laboratory for children to develop healthy relationships with food and continue to foster SEL development.



What are the SEL competencies?	
Self Management	Regulates emotions, thoughts and behaviors
Self Awareness	Identifies emotions, personal assets, areas for growth, and potential external resources and supports
Self Efficacy	Motivates, perseveres, and sees themselves as capable
Social Management	Makes safe and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions
Social Awareness	Takes the perspective of and empathizes with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures
Social Engagement	Considers others and shows a desire to contribute to the well-being of school and community

METHODS

- Conducted a comprehensive needs assessment at one elementary school to develop an implementation plan including:



- Completed a literature review on the effects of cafeteria environment factors on dietary intake
- Assessed the effectiveness of social and emotional learning strategies on academic performance, behavior outcomes, and emotional support
- Developed SEL-focused implementation strategies based on the six competencies to make the cafeteria environment a positive place to eat a nourishing meal and socialize with peers

RESULTS

<p>SELF MANAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Communicate clear, succinct cafeteria expectations to students ➤ Facilitate cafeteria tours ➤ Encourage teachers to role-play pre-corrective strategies to manage emotions when in cafeteria 	<p>SOCIAL MANAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Set expectations to maintain quieter noise volume ➤ Increase staff to student ratio for students and staff to build connections during lunch
<p>SELF AWARENESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implement student feedback system ➤ Conduct focus groups with students, paraprofessionals, and administrators to develop innovative ideas to increase enjoyment in cafeteria 	<p>SOCIAL AWARENESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implement orderly line systems for entering and leaving cafeteria ➤ Implement strategies to calm students when coming into the cafeteria from recess ➤ Organize and plan try-it tours for specific new and culturally relevant menu items
<p>SELF EFFICACY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implement cafeteria/class leaders from each class to help in cafeteria clean up 	<p>SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increase menu posting in the cafeteria and classroom ➤ Create morning routines for teachers to announce daily menu ➤ Implement a school-wide attention getting signal

Cafeteria Flow and Expectation Signs

STEP 1: STAND IN LINE QUIETLY.

STEP 2: PUT YOUR NUMBER IN KEYPAD.

STEP 3: TAKE MILK: "ONLY IF YOU PLAN TO DRINK IT"

STEP 4: SALAD BAR: "REQUIRED" MUST TAKE AT LEAST A 1/2 CUP FRUIT OR VEGETABLE. PLEASE USE TONGS.

STEP 5: SELECT ENTREE: MEAT OR NO MEAT. STUDENT MUST TAKE AT LEAST 3 COMPONENTS ON TRAY. 1/2 CUP FRUIT/VEG COUNTS AS 1 COMPONENT.

STEP 6: CONDIMENT TABLE. ADD TOPPINGS TO YOUR FOOD. PLEASE KEEP THE STATION CLEAN.

STEP 7: FIND YOUR SEAT AND EAT YOUR FOOD. "TALK IN LEVEL 1 VOICE" "LEAVE NO TRACE" "DO NOT LEAVE YOUR SEAT" "WAIT TO BE SERVED"

STEP 8: TAKE TRAY AND ALL TRASH WITH YOU. STAND IN LINE QUIETLY.

STEP 9: DUMP TRASH AND LEFTOVER FOOD INTO GARBAGE CAN.

STEP 10: STACK TRAY NICELY.

CONCLUSIONS

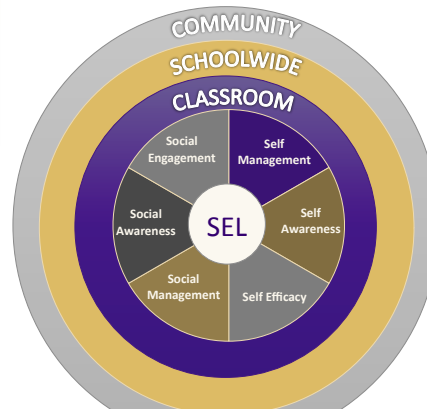
- To build a positive cafeteria environment for students and staff, efforts should be continually made to reassess the volume level, student conduct, adherence to cafeteria expectations and flow, and improved perceptions and attitudes towards the cafeteria environment by students and staff.
- Strategies to improve SEL in the cafeteria should be applied to schools district-wide.



Incorporating customization and student inspired, culturally relevant recipes on the menu helps build SEL skills, specifically social awareness and self-efficacy.

*For a complete list of references, please contact Kelsey at kkinder3@uw.edu.

SEL strategies are MOST EFFECTIVE when the six competencies are comprehensively applied.



*Competencies and SEL social ecological model adapted from CASEL and Washington State's SEL Implementation Guide.