



Building Bridges for Children's Mental Health

An Introduction to Colorado's Emotional and Social Wellness (ESW) Standard



Colorado Academic Standards include an Emotional & Social Wellness Standard

Emotional and Social Wellness is included as one standard within the Colorado Department of Education's Comprehensive Health & Physical Education Standards.

Mastery of the *Emotional and Social Wellness* standard means that graduates will be able to "utilize knowledge and skills to enhance mental, emotional, and social well-being" and "exhibit responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings."

Primary Goals of Colorado's Emotional & Social Wellness Standard

The **Emotional and Social Wellness (ESW)** standard provides a developmental framework regarding social-emotional skills that are expected at each grade level. The Emotional and Social Wellness Standard includes mental, emotional, and social health skills that enable a student to:

- recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, handle challenging situations constructively, resolve conflicts respectfully, manage stress, and make ethical choices;
- examine internal and external influences on mental and social health; and
- identify common mental and emotional health problems and their effect on physical health.

Skills for Emotional and Social Wellness can be Taught

The ESW Standard is grounded in the research on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), a growing body of research that demonstrates the importance of recognizing this area as a significant part of students' overall skill development. The term "Social-Emotional Learning" conveys the idea that Emotional and Social Wellness consists of skills that can be learned. Optimal development will occur when these skills are taught, modeled, practiced and reinforced. Ideally, SEL will be embedded within all classrooms and will be consistent throughout the building. This holds true for Colorado's ESW standard as well.

Research-Based Outcomes of Social-Emotional Learning

The positive outcomes and benefits of social-emotional learning (SEL) are clearly established in the research. Over the past three decades, this research has indicated the need for educators to take on this responsibility. When educators include SEL in their daily practices, they are promoting skills necessary to increase student academic achievement, as well as those skills necessary for lifelong personal and professional success¹. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that educators already have the necessary skills to successfully implement SEL. Colorado's *Emotional and Social Wellness* standards is designed in such a way to integrate SEL into daily teaching practices to create safe, inclusive, and effective learning environments in line with Teacher Quality Standard II.

SEL improves academic performance by increasing students' capacity for learning.

Students who received SEL demonstrated²:

- ✓ Increased pro-social behavior
- ✓ Increased mastery of subject material
- ✓ Improved grades
- ✓ 11-percentile-point gain in academic achievement²
- ✓ Increased motivation to learn
- ✓ Improved attendance
- ✓ Better attitude towards school
- ✓ Increased graduation rates
- ✓ More commitment and attachment to school
- ✓ Improved prospects for employment

SEL also reduces behavior problems, leading to²:

- ✓ Fewer suspensions and expulsions
- ✓ Decreased violent delinquency
- ✓ Fewer disciplinary referrals
- ✓ Reduced substance abuse
- ✓ Decreased grade retention

¹ Elias, 2006; Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004;

² Durlack & Weissberg, 2005; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Hawkins et al., 1997 & 1999; Malecki & Elliott, 2002; Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Walbert, 2004



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Examples of Colorado's *Emotional & Social Wellness* Standard

The *Emotional & Social Wellness* Standard includes Prepared Graduate Competencies that contribute to postsecondary workforce readiness. Each prepared graduate competency is supported by grade level expectations for preschool through high school students. The grade level expectations are concepts and skills students should be able to apply and transfer across contexts and enhance their 21st century skills. Examples of grade level expectations include the following:

- **Students in second grade** will demonstrate positive and helpful behavior and words toward other students. Students can:
 - a. Describe how positive social interaction can make physical activity with others more fun
 - b. Participate in a variety of group settings without distracting behavior
 - c. Encourage others by using verbal and nonverbal communication
- **Students in seventh grade** will develop strategies to communicate ideas and feelings. Students can:
 - a. Demonstrate through verbal and nonverbal behavior cooperation with peers of different backgrounds
 - b. Consider the consequences of various choices, and make a responsible decision when confronted with negative peer pressure
- **Students in high school** will utilize knowledge to enhance mental, emotional, and social wellbeing. Students can:
 - a. Analyze the interrelationship of physical, mental, emotional, and social health.
 - b. Set goals, and monitor progress on attaining goals for future success.
 - c. Advocate to improve or maintain positive mental and emotional health for self and others.

Standards can be found at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/scripts/allstandards/COStandards.asp?stid=3?glid=0&pgcid=37>

Keys to Successful Implementation

While the body of research shows definitively the academic and school environment benefits of SEL, it also demonstrates that, like the teaching of any subject, the selected instructional materials and teacher training in the subject matter affects the degree to which students can apply and transfer the material. The most effective approach to teach these skills would be to teach and make connections across all content areas.

Researchers found that student gains in all five of the outcome areas occurred when SEL programs were well-implemented in the school, classroom teachers trained in SEL were the primary implementers, and the programs met S.A.F.E. criteria³:

- Use a **Sequenced** set of activities to develop SEL skills in a step-by-step fashion.
- Use **Active** forms of learning, such as role-plays and behavioral rehearsal that provide students with opportunities to practice SEL skills.
- **Focus** attention on SEL, with at least eight sessions devoted to SEL skill development.
- **Explicitly** target particular SEL skills for development, with skills identified in learning objectives.

Steps and Process to Help with Implementation

Establish a Steering Committee— The purpose of the steering committee is to plan and oversee the SEL effort. Committee members should include diverse key stakeholders to increase buy-in of the effort.

- **Prioritize Emotional and Social Wellness Standards**
- **Conduct a Needs Assessment and/or Readiness Assessment**
- **Survey Existing Resources** within existing school policies, practices, programs, and special services
- **Identify a community** to move forward with SEL
- **Include key stakeholders in selecting an SEL program**

Year One

- **Start Small**—Schools may decide to choose a grade level to pilot the SEL program. Start with a pilot and build on success.
- **Establish Professional Development Activities**—Most teaching programs do not include specific instruction on SEL. Provide school training, coaching, and group support to help with the implementation.
- **Monitor Progress and Evaluate Impact**—Explore how well the program has been implemented by assessing how many teachers participated in staff development workshops, utilizing feedback from the workshop, determining how many teachers are using the program, and documenting the number of times the implementation staff meets.

Effective Implementation is a Process

Research suggests that implementation of school-wide SEL programming in a high quality, integrated, and sustainable way may take three to five years⁴.

³ Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning ⁴ Hall & Hord, 2006



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Resources

- A Family Guide to Keeping Youth Mentally Healthy & Drug Free, <http://family.samhsa.gov>
- Building Bridges Tip Sheets, www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/BuildingBridges.asp
- Center for Social and Emotional Education, www.schoolclimate.org/guidelines/teachingandlearning.php
- Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, <http://prevention.samhsa.gov/>
- Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, <http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/>
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, www.casel.org
- Health Curriculum Analysis Tool (HECAT), www.cdec.gob/HealthyYouth/HECAT/index.htm
- Social-Emotional Development, Social-Emotional Learning in Schools, Lessons and Activities, Program Websites, Best Practices and Links to Partners and Prevention Resources for Schools and Families, www.casel.org/links.php#sel.
- Maternal & Child Health Library at Georgetown University, www.mchlibrary.info/KnowledgePaths/kp_Mental_Healthy.html
- Sustainable School-wide Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): Implementation Guide and Toolkit, www.casel.org/pub/sel_toolkit.php
- The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, <http://prevention.samsha.gov>
- The National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices, <http://nrepp.samsha.gov>

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