PROJECT FLOURISH

SEEN — VALUED — HEARD

Sustainable
SEL ASSESSMENT STORIES

The Education Collaboratory
at Yale

School Stories

STUDENT EMOTION REGULATION ASSESSMENT

Getting Specific About Helping Students Feel Supported

In a public middle school, adolescent students shared that the SERA student report facilitated awareness, understanding, and reflection of emotion regulation strategy use at school. However, they noted discomfort talking about their emotions due to cultural constraints and implications about emotion experience and expression. A school team met to review and discuss the SERA school report. Educators appreciated the actionable things that they can do to support students' emotion regulation development. They felt validated to see things that they already do in the classroom. Educators also brainstormed ways to increase student engagement in SEL, such as normalizing emotional responses, normalizing emotion regulation difficulties, normalizing use of specific strategies (e.g., avoidance/escape), showing students the SERA data at grade level to start meaningful conversations about emotion regulation, or using service-learning opportunities for students to teach peers/younger students about emotion regulation.

Integrating School Reports into School Curriculum

In a public high school, adolescent students shared that the SERA student report gave them insight into how they manage their emotions at school. They found the emotion regulation strategy profile interesting because it showed them the strategies they frequently used – whether it be consciously or unconsciously. One student pointed out that they do not know how to relax, and their SERA student report confirmed it. Another student indicated that they did not realize they used avoidance frequently till they read their SERA student report. A school team met to review and discuss the SERA school report. They brainstormed ways to integrate the actionable recommendations from the SERA school report into not only SEL lessons but also mainstream curriculum, such as analyzing the SERA results during math class, or discussing the strategies that characters use to handle emotional situations during ELA or history class. The SEL committee planned to continue working on this with curriculum development leads/department heads.

Enhancing Existing SEL Curriculum

In a public elementary school, the educators shared that the SERA was easy to administer. The narrations, illustrations, and character animation enhanced student understanding and engagement with the assessment. However, educators noted that it is better to administer the SERA in smaller groups of five (rather than the whole class) for younger students in grades 1-2. They added that a 1-minute brain break in the middle of the assessment was helpful across grades. A school team met to review grade-level and classroom-level data, determine areas of strength and growth specific to each grade and classroom, and brainstorm next steps. For instance, the school team found that students of a particular grade level reported lower use of somatic relaxation (despite SEL curriculum focusing on deep breathing and muscle relaxation) and planned to incorporate more practice opportunities in SEL lesson planning.

Creating a Common Language for Student Learning

In a private K-12 school, the school team found concrete and simple definitions, classroom examples, and sample items of the emotion regulation strategies in the SERA school report helpful in creating a common language on emotion regulation across grade levels. They envision teaching these common strategies and using common terminology with students at a young age, and building on their learning as they grow up. The goal is for students to have as many strategies as possible in their emotion regulation toolbox and to make sure they are not overutilizing or underutilizing any strategy, given that no one strategy is helpful for every person or in every situation. The plan is to readminister the SERA in a year to see if students' strategy use is aligned to the new SEL curriculum or more balanced out.

Leveraging Data for Culturally Responsive Practices

In a public elementary school, the SEL team leveraged the SERA data to advance racial equity by examining the similarities and differences in emotion regulation use across racial/ethnic groups. The school anticipated the somatic relaxation coping strategy as the primary approach, given the school's focus on relaxation and mindfulness. Surprisingly, problem-solving emerged as the highest coping strategy used by students, highlighting the importance of data-driven decision-making and the need for nuanced SEL interventions that embrace the diverse coping strategies of Black students. The plan is to readminister the SERA in the next school year, with the goal of guiding the SEL team in fostering an inclusive and supportive environment that celebrates students' cultural identities and empowers them to thrive academically and emotionally.

Promoting Student Voice and Emotional Health

The Diversity Team at this public high school has worked for years to promote acceptance and tolerance in their school. When the results of the School Climate Walkthrough indicated that different groups of students in the school wanted more of a voice, the Team went on to develop videos and workshops on a variety of topics, including mental health, LGBTQ identity, physical ability, and more. *"This was a perfect progression for our work. Not only were we continuing to work on how we can be an ally to others, but the natural next step was to look at how we can teach students to be an ally to themselves through promoting emotional health. We found that it is easier to accept others if we first accept ourselves."* said a Team staff member. Having worked to promote relationships between different groups in school, the team is now considering how to address the negative emotions that individually impact students' well-being and success. Their ideas include student-to-student support, and targeted kindness initiatives at certain times throughout the year.

Spreading Positivity through Kindness Notes

When this public middle school used the School Climate Walkthrough, they were immediately drawn to their school's social safety score. They thought this was such an important category because they want students to feel safe in a social setting and be able to learn during the school day. So they set out to improve the overall environment and help their school be better through a kindness campaign! They set up four tables throughout the school with materials for students to write notes of kindness to peers or teachers. Because there can be so much negativity in the world, the student-led team thought that an intentional focus on promoting kindness and positivity would make their school better, as well as even make change on social media, which they know can be a toxic and unhealthy environment The team plans to continue the kindness campaign in future school years!

You are
very KIND

Helping Students Feel Connected and Supported

This public high school wanted to make their school community feel more connected and supported. They used the Walkthrough and found a disconnect between how students currently feel in school and how they want to feel every day. The Teen Leadership Team (including students and faculty) decided to focus their efforts on making every student in school feel connected and supported. The team built mini-projects around connection and support, such as "the Connected and Supported Showcase" and "If Only My Teacher Knew." They also launched an Awareness Day, featuring workshops on the topics their peers listed as the most important. Workshop topics included planning for the future, career options, depression and anxiety, kickboxing, yoga, decision-making, college sports, self-defense, transitioning to college, and even a therapy dog. Students rotated through workshops of their choosing, where they were engaged in thoughtful discussion and relationship-building activities.

Promoting a Positive School Atmosphere and Encouraging Digital Literacy

In this Pre-K-8 grade private school, the Walkthrough data identified social safety as an area of growth. A student-led team knew that kids can sometimes be bullied or teased in school, and they wanted to prevent this from happening. The team sponsored a school-wide digital poster competition, encouraging their peers to submit inspiring poster designs. They wanted to help students feel more happiness and energy and feel excited about learning as well as have a chance to put their creativity to use through technology. They noticed students talking positively about the posters on the walls. When they re-surveyed their school climate, they noticed that students reported feeling more happy, excited, content, purposeful, comfortable, hopeful, and inspired.

- 62% of students said the project made their school better
- 64% said they hope the team does more projects like this
- 41% want to be part of projects like this in the future

Creating a Hands-On Learning Day

This public middle school used the School Climate Walkthrough and found they wanted to improve student-to-student relationships, teaching quality, and school pride after an extended period of online learning due to COVID-19. They agreed that looking at screens all day was exhausting! A student-led team decided to work with teachers to incorporate more hands-on learning projects and activities in their curriculum. Their aims for the project were to improve teaching quality and make it more enjoyable to learn and gain better and deeper knowledge and understanding, help students develop better relationships with each other through interaction, increase school pride and feelings of community through fundraising, integrate youth voice and empowerment through their survey, and provide students with a screen break. After the hands-on learning day, the second survey showed that students reported feeling happy, excited, hopeful, and supported as their top words.

Balancing Teacher Creative Autonomy with Constructive Feedback

At a Title 1. middle school the educators and principal convened to discuss the results of their Educator Well-Being Survey. The principal noted that within the Teacher-Principal Relationships section, educators had given high ratings to having autonomy in their classrooms, but had also given a lower rating to receiving constructive feedback from leadership. The principal expressed his dedication to increasing time spent in the classrooms, helping and observing, and providing educators with feedback over the next semester; but he also asked for help in how to do so without lowering the sense of educator autonomy that was a real strength of the report. This led to a nuanced discussion on what to do next, with teachers able to express their specific needs to leadership, and leadership really hearing them. The school plans to do the assessment again exactly one year later to see if they achieved their goals.

Getting Specific About Helping Educators Feel Valued

A private, 6-12 school completed the Educator Well-Being Survey and chose to focus on educators feeling more valued. The conversation quickly got into specifics. For one, all juniors and seniors at the school are provided with parking spaces, leaving faculty to spend time searching for spots, or resorting to parking down the street. "*The first feeling I get upon arriving at work is the daily reminder that the students' (and their parents') entitlement is more important than me feeling calm and collected rather than frustrated and frazzled*", said one educator. Plans are now in place to begin addressing this concern - a small but powerful change in setting the tone in the building.

Supporting Teachers During Difficult Times to Cultivate Trust and Recognition

Returning to school in-person, full-time, after the COVID shutdown presented schools across the country with unprecedented challenges. This Title 1 middle school was no exception. Added to the mix was an anticipated teacher strike. Looking at their survey results, rather than focusing on negatives associated with the well-being of their teachers, the school leadership team chose to build on the key asset underscored in the EWB Survey: Teacher-Leader Relationships. The principal knew that the impending strike would be anxiety-provoking, so he enlisted the leadership team, and together they tapped into ways to continue to build trust, recognition, and collegiality—areas of opportunity they noted in their survey data. They engaged in multiple ways to honor staff, including maintaining an open-door policy by the principal, celebrating Pi Day with actual pies, offering "room service" to teachers during the school day, and distributing logo jackets to all staff. Despite the times of strife concerning factors outside the control of the school itself, by building on an area of relative strength, educators improved the overall EWB within the school.

Approaching an Area of Need with a Tangible Solution

When this suburban elementary school reviewed its survey data, the results confirmed what they had suspected: teachers in the building did not feel safe. In fact, between Fall 2022 and Spring 2023, educator ratings on their sense of physical safety actually declined. Members of the administration, along with a small school team, rallied to outline their security needs in order to recruit a safety officer who had experience working with children and families. The school recently hired a former police officer with the Department of Children and Family Services. They have deployed this person to not only greet buses in the morning and at dismissal and walk through the hallways throughout the day but also to work with students and families before discipline issues escalate. A coaching manager strives to improve their employees' long-term professional development. They have a passion for teaching and watching their employees grow. And they're more patient with short-term failure as long as the team learns and improves.
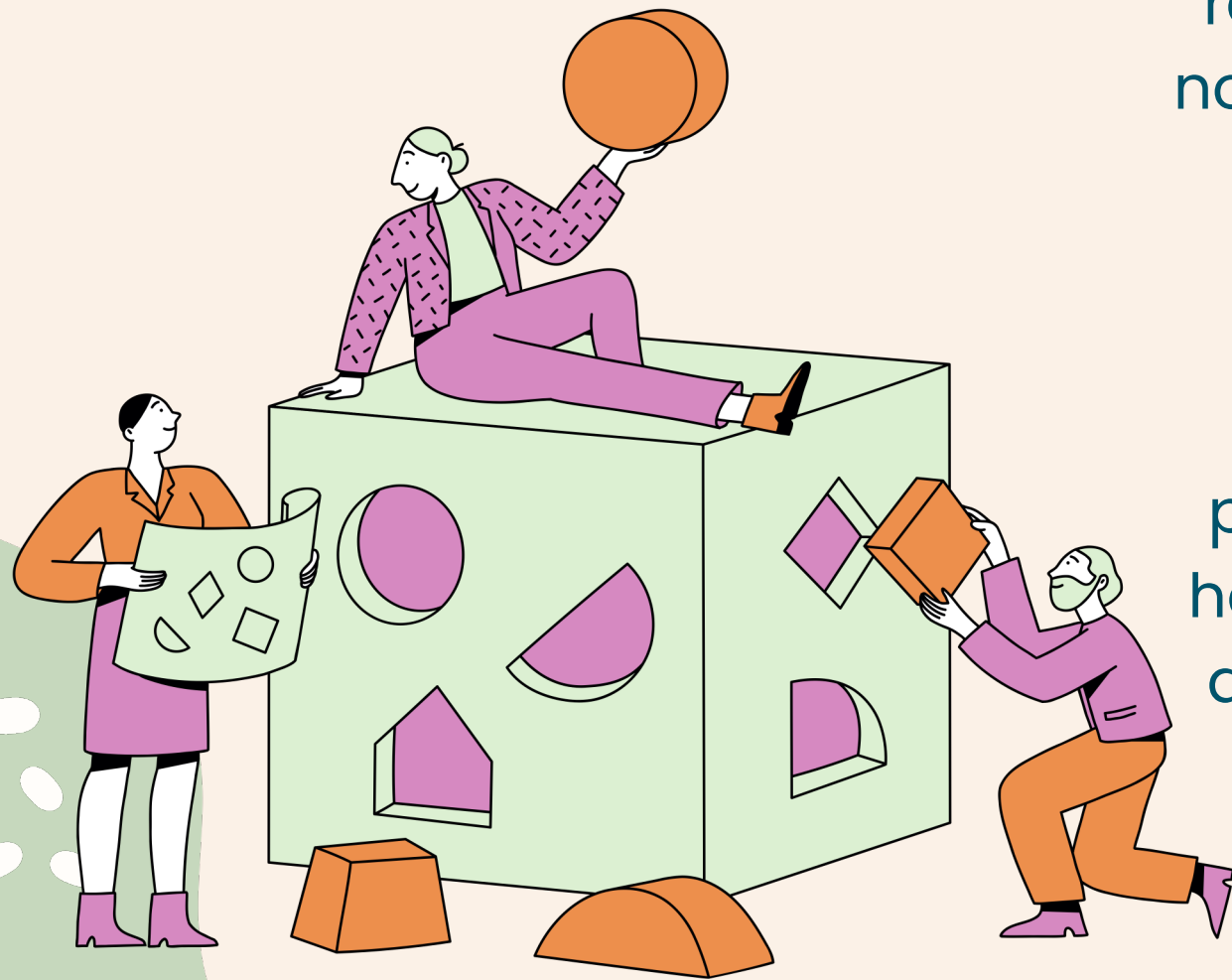
Reframing into a Growth Mindset

This small, rural middle school saw a spike in student discipline issues sparked by the COVID pandemic and amplified when students returned full-time to their school buildings. Survey data pointed to declines in student behavior, collaboration, engagement, respect, and cooperation. The conventional approach was to assign students detentions during lunchtime; however, it was clear that this was an ineffective strategy. Teachers suggested that, for students, punitive framing during lunch was not constructive. In response, administration deployed the school social worker to meet with students during lunch and provide them with the opportunity to discuss their challenges, especially pertaining to behavior issues. After several months, students actually requested time for lunch with the social worker, and discipline issues declined.

Thank you!

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