

Finding new ways to develop Noncognitive Factors
By Sarah Clampham



Soft Skills, 21st Century Skills, Emotional Intelligence, Mindsets and Behaviors, and Workforce Readiness Skills are all synonymous to those intrinsic factors we, as professional school counselors, want to equip each of our students with as they develop into competent adults. We understand the importance of these skills, but often have a hard time finding time and strategies to reach everyone. Noncognitive Factors have orbited in and out of school-wide curriculum for years. The pendulum swings between fostering our student body's social emotional development and being accountable for standardized test scores. The reality is that academic success comes from fundamentals skills like motivation, self-awareness, emotional regulation, and grit. When a school embeds social emotional learning into the curriculum the impact on students can lead to an increase in academic behaviors, attitudes, and strategies (Conley 2007). So as counselors, how do we design a culture where such important learning begins to happen in our school counseling programs? How do we find time and support to tackle program implementation and management with our already outrageously busy positions? Luckily, suggestions that seem to be the most time and cost efficient are strategies that we are already trained on, and utilize in our day to day.

Classroom guidance- The focus of your SEL curriculum should align with ASCA mindsets and behaviors. Teach interpersonal awareness, empathy, cooperation, assertion, personal responsibility, and social/emotional learning. *MindUp Curriculum* has great lessons to educate students on how brain development benefits from positive mind sets. *WOOP!* is an evidence based activity to help students set goals and problem solve. *Random Acts of Kindness* has free lessons available on the web site.

Small groups- Peer counseling, peer mentoring and peer mediation programs empower students to empathize with other students. *Making Smart Choices: Social Emotional Skills for Adolescent Girls*, is a comprehensive curriculum with lessons and activities to develop small groups. Role plays helps students engage with each other. Essential skills or life skills workshops are a great way to focus on specific skills, attitudes or behaviors.

Individual counseling- Carol Dweck's *Mindset* is a great tool to teach perseverance, lower anxiety and develop positive self-talk. Understanding fixed mindsets vs growth mindsets have positive changes in self-perception (Dweck et al., 2011).

Professional Development- Teaching teachers through professional development and continuing education can be a way to support an entire student body. Studies show Improving social/emotional skills connect students to school, impact social behaviors, reduce conduct issues. (Payton et al., 2008) Advisement Programs can have a huge impact on school culture and performance. *Skillful.com*

is a virtual support network to build workforce readiness coaching skills through webinars. CTE also offers a credential to help build your professional skills to support students in determining their college/career pathways. *CASEL.org* is an online network focused on implementing SEL curriculum in schools.

Developing an avenue to implement noncognitive factors into your school's curriculum not only impacts the students' learning, it also influences the school culture, workforce readiness, and the community. There is a strong correlation between self-control, student engagement and even future financial stability and crime reduction (Gutman & Schoon, 2013). Adapting some of these strategies is an educationally effective ways to develop lifelong success skills for all students.

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