

Social and Emotional Learning

How will social and emotional learning (SEL) benefit the parents and students in the Canton Public Schools? Superintendent of Canton Schools, Kevin D. Case, began to seriously explore this question five years ago. Case understood the urgency of integrating this learning into traditional academic curriculum and began to map out a multi-layered plan for students and educators at every grade level. “We want all students who graduate in our system to be effective communicators, excellent collaborators, critical thinkers, problem solvers and compassionate citizens,” said Case. “When you look at our Vision of the Canton Graduate, this would not be possible without the implementation of social and emotional learning.”

As defined by CASEL (the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning), SEL is “the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions.”

In 2015, Case was introduced to Deene Morris, Canton resident and principal of Inspire Leadership LLC (inspire-leadershiptoday.com). Morris is an EQ and Psychological Safety coach and facilitator with clients nationally, as well as an adjunct faculty in this field of study. (For clarity, SEL is the term used in K-12 and EQ is the term employed in the business world. The goals and objectives are identical). From the start, Case and Morris recognized their shared values and a fruitful partnership began.

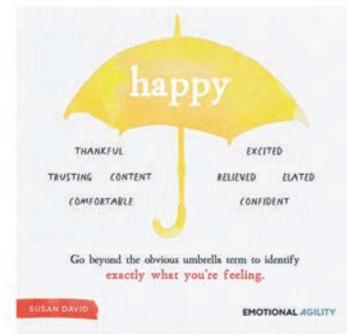
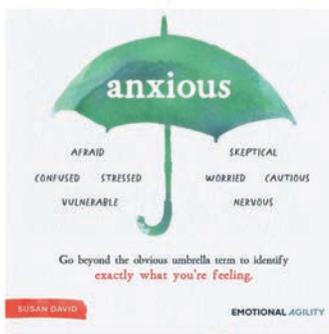
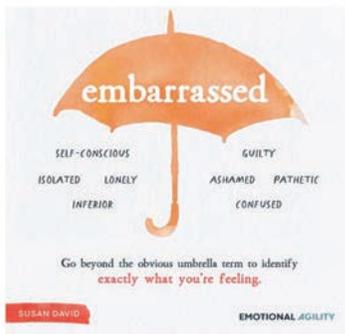
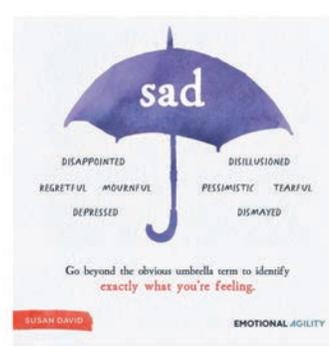
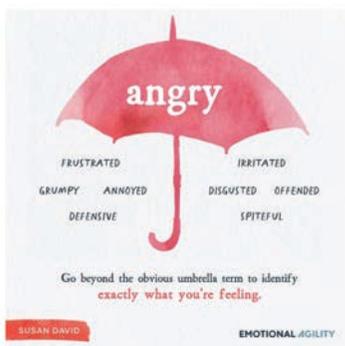
A key component is the Canton EQ (Emotional Intelligence) Academy, in which now more than 100 educators in the Canton Public Schools have participated. “Teachers have the opportunity to learn more about themselves, their own engagement with emotional intelligence and then how to directly apply this into meaningful strategies and activities for our students,” Case said. This year, the district not only continues its training through the EQ Academy but also offered additional professional development training, and educational sessions for parents and the Class of 2021, all facilitated by Morris.

“SEL skills are not fixed, static or predictive. They also are not trait-based. SEL skills are teachable, learnable, behavioral and observable, and offer us a wonderful opportunity for engagement and greater fulfillment,” says Morris. By actively incorporating SEL training for educators, Superintendent Case

is simultaneously providing students a foundation for lifelong learning and success. Case notes that the younger students become familiar with these skills, the greater their potential for self-management, success and happiness as they navigate their adult life.

Morris states that many people think SEL means being kind, sensitive and empathetic. While these are critical skills, she notes that SEL also helps us build and sustain rewarding relationships, communicate effectively, influence and persuade, manage conflict, bounce back from stress and make better decisions. In the EQ Academy, Canton educators cover all this and more in multiple, two-hour workshops. “It is pure joy to work with Superintendent Case and the educators,” says Morris. “Kevin is open and honest about his commitment to EQ and personal growth, and his modeling invites the educators to be equally open, curious and engaged. The learning and insight to action application is rich and immediate.

The EQ Academy begins with emotional self-awareness, and Morris notes it is the foundation upon which all other skills flourish. “Think of a big box of crayons. We want a lot of colors to draw a fabulous picture. Same with our feelings. We want all colors because the more we can recognize our feelings, the more data we gain. For example, you or your child feels angry or irritable today. Okay, so what’s beneath that? A good practice is to identify 2-3 additional feelings. Maybe you are actually frustrated, confused or disappointed. Whether pleasant or unpleasant, there is no good or bad emotion. While pleasant emotions feel great, unpleasant emotions inform us how to better care for ourselves. Another related SEL skill is self-regard, which is our ability and tendency to like ourselves, in full light of our strengths and weaknesses. Morris notes that for most of us, COVID has challenged our self-regard. Yet, she continues, “this skill is directly correlated with our happiness and well-being, so we want to take it seriously. We want to practice it ourselves and model and support this with our kids.”



Inspire Leadership LLC. 2021



Source: Susan David: Emoti

In all her workshops, Morris introduces a concept, shares theory, and then invites the teachers to self-evaluate and develop new strategies for themselves and their students. The teachers are curious and invested in this learning, says Morris, and she always learns right along with them. “You can’t reach and teach students if you’re not actively engaging the skills yourself.” For example, empathy is an SEL skill that is often grossly misunderstood and thus not modeled successfully, states Morris. Yet it is core to problem solving. Empathy, notes Morris, “is your ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes and feel what they are feeling - whether or not you agree with them - and that’s the hardest part!” She observes that we can become so task oriented that we miss rich emotional data to problem solve in conversations. Morris is often surprised when people think problem solving should be devoid of emotion. She emphasizes that we cannot make effective decisions if we do not recognize our own emotions, and the emotions of others. This is the only successful path to conflict management. This skill naturally leads to the exploration of stress management, resiliency and flexibility and once again, this insight is applied to both the educators and their students. All of SEL falls under the umbrella of psychological safety, which is integrated into all workshops. In its simplest terms, Morris says, this means a culture of rewarded vulnerability where it is safe to be yourself, to speak up, take risks, make mistakes and fail-forward. This is the essence of learning and growth for youth and adults. Last month, Morris addressed par-

ents in a virtual session on SEL and illustrated that the SEL skills learned in K-12 are exactly what future employers also seek. Case noted that the World Economic Forum specifically identifies SEL skills as critical to job success. “The top 10 skills include problem solving, self-management, working with people, interpersonal skills - all the skills Deene is teaching,” he said. “It’s very practical and that’s what makes it so critical that the Canton Public School emphasize SEL education as well as our academic education.” This month, Deene will also present a workshop with the high school seniors on Essential Motivator patterns. This learning lens is not prescriptive but provides invaluable insight into core needs, drives, values and talents. Morris notes this is a very popular workshop with her clients at conferences and retreats. “So often we don’t recognize our native talents, and thus we don’t honor what gives us endless energy, or conversely, what drains us. This model provides an insightful road map for graduating seniors to choose a direction that will help them translate their skills to the workplace and life in general.” Mounting evidence and research concludes that SEL and EQ skills are the foundation for lifelong learning, fulfillment and success, and Morris and Case both heartily agree. “The more we know ourselves, the better we can shift our perspective to understand others, and we all need a boost of feeling great about ourselves and knowing what we do really well,” Morris said. “Once again, it’s an area that is especially crucial right now.”



Canton Public Schools

Opening Minds ... Transforming Lives

Spring 2021



Giving Back and Spreading Cheer



Students and staff at the Canton Public Schools have not let the pandemic prevent efforts to give back and strengthen community bonds. At top members of the CHS LEO Club prepare flowerpot kits for local seniors. At left, Canton Intermediate School art students made this and other banners for essential workers. Above: The Canton Intermediate Student Council organized an effort to help with the Jack Bannon Turkey Trot. See story on page 6.

Our Mission

Our mission is to prepare independent, productive, respectful and responsible citizens who contribute to an ever-changing world. We pursue continuous improvement while honoring our strong educational legacy and traditions. We unite with families and the community to provide challenging educational experiences that promote the intellectual, physical, social and emotional potential of our students.

Our Vision

As a leader among schools and a source of pride in our community, the Canton Public Schools enrich the present and shape the future of its students by opening minds and transforming lives.

Our Values

Collaboration ~ Kindness ~ Integrity

We partner with our students, educators, staff, families and community to: Work together with open minds, creativity and innovation; Look for ways to treat others with kindness and respect; Do our very best, be honest and hold each other accountable.