

FZ[eSf]UWdY| S^kSbbWdW| fZWEfW TWIS^ S#ELZaa^4ge| We3X|de_ SYS| | W
S^V|edMd| fWi |fZ bW| |ee|a^ aXZWB^eaUSf|a^ aXELZaa^4ge| WeAX|S'e
; fW| Sf|a^ S^3E4A|fZFWf ZWf Vaw^ af^ V|Wsd|k dWdWf fZW|W|e adba|UW
aX3E4A ; fW| Sf|a^ S1S^ VgeV|XZ|e|_ b| fV|W^ af|_ b^kS^ kWWad|W| Wf ad
dM|Y |f|a^ Tk 3E4A ; fW| Sf|a^ S^S^ V|feax|U|e adSX|fSM|z

A Visionary Approach to Fostering Social and Emotional Growth

This district took a visionary approach to meeting student needs by establishing a wide range of programs and a Behavioral Health and School Safety Department.

By Louis Laffitte Jr., EdD



COURTESY OF GLENDALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT, GLENDALE, ARIZONA

The focus on social-emotional learning has had a transformational effect on staff and students in Arizona's Glendale Elementary School District.

“Never, never, never give up.”

Winston Churchill’s famous words are displayed on a bookshelf in the Glendale Elementary School District (GESD) superintendent’s office as a constant reminder that we will never abandon our students.

More than 10 years ago, the district took on the challenge of addressing students’ social-emotional needs

head-on and making social-emotional learning (SEL) a vital component of our identity as a district community. The work has had a transformational effect on our staff and students.

Integrating SEL Districtwide

We use the five areas of competence identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional

Learning (CASEL) as a framework to integrate SEL into daily life in the district. The five areas of competence—which nurture knowledge, skills, and attitudes that advance student learning and development—are (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness, (4) relationship skills, and (5) responsible decision making. CASEL also advocates leveraging SEL to promote educational equity.

GESD integrates SEL throughout the district by

- Providing students with the social and emotional learning supports they need to learn and thrive.
- Using trauma-informed practices, including self-awareness and self-care strategies.
- Implementing positive behavior interventions and support, including bullying prevention and conflict resolution.
- Providing comprehensive wraparound services to support students, families, and staff.

In addition, each teacher delivers SEL-focused lessons daily. A pacing guide ensures continuity across the district.

Each school has an SEL specialist to support students who need social-emotional or behavior support. Although the position was initially intended to serve a few students, it became clear that all students could benefit. The SEL specialist position has evolved to promote the integration of SEL throughout each school and to provide intervention services for children and families, including assessment, short-term or crisis counseling, group instruction, support groups, and home visitation.

Promoting Empathy

The district's commitment to its young people was amplified three years ago when a GESD student committed suicide. Although GESD had a decade-long history of providing social-emotional support, Superintendent Cindy Segotta-Jones emphasized student and staff well-being by implementing an initiative to promote empathy.

Segotta-Jones took inspiration from educational psychologist Michele Borba, author of *Unselfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World*. Borba asserts that empathy is a skill that's vital for children's mental health, resilience, leadership skills, and job success.

Segotta-Jones invited Borba to keynote the district's opening ceremony for the 2019–2020 school year. The author shared several anecdotes and practical strategies related to the importance and application of empathy in our daily lives and the positive outcomes that result.

Taking a Visionary Approach

In 2019, the district also decided to forgo the traditional student services model and instead implemented a



Each GESD school has an SEL specialist to support students who need extra care.

visionary approach with the creation of the Behavioral Health and School Safety Department (BHSS). The department offers comprehensive social and emotional resources and support for students, staff, and families.

By establishing the BHSS, the district moved from being reactionary and putting out fires to being proactive and intentional, providing tools to help students and staff focus on developing critical social-emotional skills.

For example, when the staff at one school noticed that a student was struggling with self-management, the team met regularly to discuss the student's needs and to brainstorm ways to establish a rapport with the student and help him develop social skills. After several months, the transformed student was recommended for and became an active member of the superintendent's Student Advisory Council.

Recently, GESD added counselors, social workers, and behavioral specialists to bolster the variety of services and supports provided to the district's students, families, and staff. In addition to delivering direct services, such as counseling, social work, and social-emotional support, GESD partners with several outside agencies to offer wraparound services, such as a continuum of health, education, and social services, as well as school-based counseling. The district provides formal and informal screening to assess students' need for support by outside agencies and provides space for services on several campuses.

Providing Multitiered Support

A multitiered system of support (MTSS) promotes an integrated framework of fluid academic, behavioral, and social-emotional learning for all students. Our MTSS framework is prevention based and team driven. The

team makes decisions after comprehensive data collection and careful data analysis. Collaborative team members follow the MTSS problem-solving process to identify, plan, and implement targeted interventions to improve outcomes for all students.

Our MTSS framework is a tiered system that helps us identify struggling students and provide appropriate interventions. With this plus-plus system of support, we add to and layer each tier so students receive all levels of support, and no students fall through the cracks.

To ensure that the work is relevant and timely, a district-wide MTSS team—comprising site administrators, SEL specialists, counselors, social workers, behavioral specialists, and BHSS team leaders—meets monthly to review the data and discuss progress toward the established goals.

Mental health and suicide prevention strategies are in operation throughout the district. All staff members are trained in the strategies and have the tools and knowledge to identify students who are experiencing trauma and to provide the support necessary to encourage a favorable outcome.

As GESD continues this work, the momentum is now toward expanding services. In spring 2021, the governing board voted to repurpose one of GESD's facilities into a system of care center. The center will provide



Empathy is a particular focus in GESD schools.

mental health services, social services, juvenile justice services, and more to all community members.

By taking the same systematic approach established within the district and customizing services for our community, we are taking an active role in supporting our families to ensure the success of our students.

Louis Laffitte Jr. is assistant superintendent for behavioral health and school safety for Glendale Elementary School District in Glendale, Arizona. llaffitte@gesd40.org

ASBO ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS INTERNATIONAL

ADVANCE YOUR CAREER WHILE SUPPORTING YOUR PEERS IN SCHOOL BUSINESS.

JOIN AN ASBO INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE TODAY!

To view the current openings, visit asbointl.org/Committees.