

## **Supporting Emotional Intelligence Through a Professional Learning Community**

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*"There are certain emotions that will kill your drive, frustration, and confusion. You can change these to a positive force. Frustration means you are on the verge of a breakthrough. Confusion can mean you are about to learn something. Expect the breakthrough and expect to learn."*

*— Kathleen Spike, Master Certified Coach*

A pandemic? Distance Learning? Zooms? Social Distancing? Virtual? Synchronous and Asynchronous learning? Who would have known that the world would be in a frenzy in 2020? According to the Center of the Developing Child at Harvard University, "The coronavirus outbreak has changed many things about our daily lives and modern education as we know it" (2020 p.1). Forcefully, educators had to learn alternative ways to reach out and remotely teach in new creative methods. Students and parents faced uncharted waters by having to learn to structure, manage, and promote learning in addition to channeling their thoughts and feelings in ways no one ever imagined.

According to Stella Otai (2020), the effects on their academics were not the only part of growth impacted by COVID 19. Studies show that the impact of school closures during this Coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated adverse effects on children and adolescents (COVID-19 Mental Health Effects on Children and Adolescents, 2020, para. 2). It was detrimental to the emotional intelligence development of our children. According to Grade Power Learning (2019), "Emotional intelligence is a child's ability to identify, evaluate, control, and express his or her emotions" (How Emotional Intelligence Helps Kids, 2019). A high level of emotional intelligence helps a child use feelings to identify and solve challenges, communicate with others, and make decisions. Peg Rosen (2020) emphasized that emotional intelligence can be especially helpful to kids with learning and thinking differences. At the same time, individual learning and

thinking differences make it harder for some children to develop it (Rosen, 2020). Throw in a pandemic and distance learning. What effect does all this event have on our students' development of emotional intelligence, and how will we address it when we reopen our schools under new and strange conditions?

Since the 1990s, however, educators and researchers have begun to realize that developing students' emotional intelligence may be just as crucial as academics (Tusten, 2017). Considering the statistics and the current situation as we write new policies and develop a curriculum that can easily transition from face-to-face instruction to remote learning at a moment's notice, we have to consider the emotional impact this event has had on our students. This paper will discuss the crucial goal of developing an emotional intelligence program in our schools to help our returning students to simplify their feelings and set them on the right track emotionally to succeed academically.

### **Literature Review on Social and Emotional Intelligence**

Recent studies in the development of emotional intelligence and social learning raise awareness of emotions, and the ability to express them in productive ways. In their persuasive article, "Emotional Intelligence," Peter Salovey and John Mayer define emotional intelligence as "The subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions. The skill to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (1990). Kerry Goyette contended, "People with low emotional intelligence (or lack it entirely) often make the mistake of only recognizing and exercising their emotional strengths. They fail to connect with their environment and the people around them. On the other hand, the most emotionally intelligent people know that in addition to understanding their own emotions, it is essential to perceive the feelings of others and the way

that their environment impacts those emotions." (A therapist shares the biggest mistake people with low emotional intelligence make: It always backfires, 2019, para. 4).

Daniel Goleman, (2014), an American psychologist who helped to popularize emotional intelligence, identifies five critical elements to emotional intelligence. These five elements are essential in determining meaningful relationships. The first element is self-awareness or the ability to channel one's thoughts and emotions and understand their impact on others.

Controlling and managing the impulses and emotions one feels toward their action or the actions of others is known as the second element of self-regulation. Goleman states, "Acting rashly or without caution can lead to mistakes being made and can often damage relationships." (Goleman, 2014). The third element of Goleman's Emotional Intelligence theory is internal motivation, the inner drive, or passion for what a person does. Internal motivation is the ability to persevere through tough times to reach a goal without extrinsic means. Empathy, the fourth part or component of emotional intelligence, is the understanding of one's own emotions, while recognizing and reacting to the feelings of others. And finally, Coleman describes social skills as the fifth element of his theory. Goleman describes social skills as "Friendliness with a purpose," meaning everyone is treated politely and with respect. (Goleman, 2014)

### **Literature Review on Emotional Intelligence Programs in Schools**

Schools have considerably evolved since I was a student in the 1980s. The launch of the personal computer, the video cassette recorder, and cable television was quickly becoming a norm in homes. The Atari 2600 video game system and the SONY Walkmans were every kids' dream. I remember academics was essential, but I don't know much about the emphasis on the development of our emotional intelligence. As children, we meant to be seen and not heard and disciplined by our parents if we acted up or challenged our teachers. So when did all this talk

about our emotional development hit the schools? According to Freedman (2017), Plato wrote, "All learning has an emotional base." (Emotional WHAT? Definitions and History of EQ (updated), 2020, para. 1) For nearly 2000 years, scientists, educators, and philosophers have labored to confirm or contradict the importance of emotions. Freedman further concluded that the prevailing thought among many was, "Emotions are in the way. They keep us from making good decisions, and they keep us from focusing" (Freedman, 2020, para. 1).

In the last three decades, a growing body of research is proving just the opposite. Research conducted by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) shows that social and emotional learning can have a positive impact on school climate and promote a host of academic, social, and emotional benefits for students. (The Missing Piece, 2013 p. 4). In another article incorporating Emotional Intelligence programs into the classroom improves learning outcomes and reduces anxiety and behavioral problems among students (Parentco., 2020, para. 5). It is evident that children thrive and succeed when the school community is deeply concerned for their emotional well being. It is only fair to help them manage their feelings and channel them in productive ways to help them grow. "Children who are able to effectively manage their thinking, attention, and behavior are also more likely to have better grades and higher standardized test scores." (Stephanie M. Jones, J.M., Barnes, S P., Bailey, R., & Doolittle, E. J., 2017, p. 50). Moreover, students' ability to learn well depends not only on instruction, but also on factors such as the school climate, a sense of belonging with peers, positive relationships with educators, and the feedback they receive.

### **Literature Review on the Impact of COVID 19 on Emotional Intelligence**

Then, the Coronavirus pandemic known as COVID 19 struck. Its horrific effect not only impacted our economy and our communities, but the damaging blow to the education of our

children is highly detrimental. In an article by the World Health Organization (WHO), children are likely experiencing worry, anxiety, and fear amid this pandemic (Mental health and psychological resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. 2020, para. 7). Schools were closed as part a of necessary measures, and they no longer had a sense of structure and stimulation. Children had less opportunity to be with their friends and get that social support that is essential for healthy mental well-being.

What about the impact COVID 19 has on our children with learning differences? Our country has a considerable number of students with learning differences that have low self-esteem attributed to their weakness in academic comprehension. In a personal interview with Sharon Isenberg, an RN at Devereux Behavioral Foundation in Victoria, Texas, she states, "Children and adults with behavioral and learning disabilities have felt the impact significantly. They not only lost connection to their structured school day that involved inclusion amongst their peers but the special education resources that accompanied their learning plans." (S. Isenberg, personal communication, July 11, 2020)

So, what does this mean? We have guidelines on how to reopen schools while practicing social distancing with sanitizing stations and temperature checks. Educators are getting professional development to learn new technology and resources necessary for the switch to virtual learning if needed. But what about the essential resources and support to help our students returning amid the fear and changes?

### **PLC Framework**

Upon the review of research and data on the effects of COVID 19 and the benefits of having emotional intelligence goals in schools, I suggest the creation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC). This PLC will be formed to prepare and provide emotional support for our

returning students at St. John Berchmans Catholic School this fall. According to *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*, a PLC is "an ongoing process in which the educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve" (DuFour, DuFour, Eakker, Many, & Mattos 2016, p. 10).

Through the adoption of a PLC, St. John Berchmans Catholic School (SJB) will develop a structure that allows teachers to collaborate and reflect as they implement emotional intelligence goals to plan instruction. This PLC structure is taken from the book, *Doing by Learning: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour et al., 2016).

### **A Focus on Learning**

The core of a learning community is a focus on and a commitment to the support of social and emotional intelligence development learning of each student. As we function as a PLC, our educators at SJB will embrace high levels of learning for all students as both the reason the organization exists, and the fundamental responsibility of those who work in it. To achieve this, the members of a PLC create a clear and compelling vision of what the organization must become to help all students learn.

Whereas many schools operate as if their primary purpose is to ensure that children are taught, PLCs are devoted to the idea that their organization exists to ensure that all students learn essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions. At SJB, our mission statement sets the foundation and is committed to the well being of our students.

With our vision and mission statement in place, each educator understands that the development of the whole child is our purpose with a focus on implementing emotional

intelligence goals. This vision and mission statement will work as their guide as they continue the PLC process throughout the school year and beyond.

### **A Collaborative Culture**

A PLC is composed of collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals linked to the purpose of learning for all (DuFour et al., 2016, p. 60). The team is the engine that drives the PLC effort and the fundamental building block of the organization. The PLC team must define specific norms, roles, and responsibilities that team members must agree to follow and uphold.

It is important to emphasize that collaboration does not lead to improved results unless people are dedicated and focused on the right issues. Therefore, their collaboration centers on four specific questions:

1. What is it we want our students to know and be able to do?
2. How will we know if each student has learned it?
3. How will we respond when some students do not learn it?
4. How will we extend the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?

To address these questions, we must first identify the emotional intelligence level of each student and align them with their developmental stage. Collaboration among team members is critical, and building a sense of shared knowledge is the best way to meet the needs of our students.

### **The SMART goals**

The Strategic, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and Time-bound, best known as SMART goals, is the structure of milestones to the purpose of the PLC team. It is within these goals that the PLC team will gather and align evidence of current emotional intelligence levels of



our students and develop strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that development stage. They will continue by implementing those strategies and plans while analyzing the impact of the changes. The PLC will discover what was effective and what was not and apply new knowledge in the next step for continuous improvement.

### **Implementing Emotional Intelligence Goals Using a PLC Framework at St. John Berchmans Catholic School**

In preparation for their return, our concentration is on the health and emotional well-being of our students. I have adapted this PLC outline from The CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL Essentials.

**Our Vision:** St. John Berchmans School believes in a holistic education that enables all students to discover themselves, their strengths, and weakness. Through methods of role modeling, teachers strive to build student's self-esteem, self-determination, self-discipline, and responsibility in an atmosphere of optimism and love.

**Our Mission:** St. John Berchmans Catholic School enables the students to reach full awareness of their God-given talents by building self-confidence, moral, civic, and spiritual values in a safe, secure, positive learning environment.

**The following are the expectations for the implementation of PLCs to promote positive emotional intelligence goals at SJB:**

- PLCs will meet once a week via Zoom, if necessary, to discuss and reflect on current practices and to self-assess, and analyze student emotional data.
- Each PLC will identify a PLC facilitator who is responsible for creating weekly agendas, facilitating discussions, and submitting the proper documentation to the administrative team.

- Each PLC will provide feedback on the emotional intelligence curriculum documents and the classroom climate and practices.
- PLCs will be evaluated twice a year (October and May) by their administrative team; this will be done using the PLC developed emotional performance rubric
- Each PLC will create quality Common Formative Assessments (CFAs) and submit two annually to their school administration for feedback.

### **Viable Curriculum**

The implementation of successful Emotional Intelligence goals is not conceivable overnight. It is a process that takes critical and explicit planning. It begins with the school leader to demonstrate reciprocal accountability in areas of social and emotional practices. Teachers must be given support and guidance through professional development to process the understanding of emotional development and the impact it has on our daily lives. Below in Figure 1.1 is a detailed outline of the implementation of a PLC at St. John Berchmans to facilitate emotional Intelligence goals into the schoolwide curriculum.

#### **St. John Berchmans PLC on Implementing Emotional Intelligence (EI) Goals**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Standard/Action</b>	<b>Persons Responsible</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Intervention</b>
<b>May-August</b>	<b>Create a team</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet 3x over the summer (Zoom if necessary)</li> <li>• Establish team roles, norms, and schedule weekly meeting times</li> <li>• Attend professional development (Webinars, live video conferencing)</li> <li>• Develop a team rubric (Google Docs)</li> </ul>	<b>Principal and teachers</b>		As needed by the principal, district leader, school counselor
<b>August</b>	<b>Foundational Learning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All-staff meeting to introduce EI (Zoom, video conferencing)</li> </ul>	<b>Principal Teachers</b>		As needed by the principal, district leader, school counselor

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop shared staff agreements (Google Docs)</li> <li>Prepare an EI program for families (Online, virtual, or face to face)</li> </ul>	<b>PLC Teams</b>		
<b>August</b>	<b>Continuously Improve Schoolwide EI Implementation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey staff on their perceptions of school and classroom climate.</li> <li>Note responses to questions about hopes and goals for students</li> </ul>	<b>PLC Teams</b> <b>Principal</b>		As needed by the principal, district leader, school counselor
<b>September-October</b>	<b>Shared Vision</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share priorities for shared vision for EI goals and identify core themes</li> <li>Facilitate a shared vision with families (Via newsletter; Zoom)</li> </ul>	<b>PLC Teams</b> <b>Principal</b>		As needed by the principal, district leader, school counselor
<b>September-October</b>	<b>Action Plan: Two Way Communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the three key priorities</li> <li>Staff EI teams</li> <li>Adopting an evidence-based program</li> <li>Improve classroom climate (Online)</li> <li>Develop SMART goals</li> <li>Develop action steps</li> <li>Determine data and schedule for review</li> <li>Develop a communication plan</li> </ul>	<b>PLC Teams</b>		As needed by the principal, district leader, school counselor
<b>October-March</b>	<b>Learn, Collaborate, Model</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare objectives and make contacts for professional learning to support staff EI Relationship building.</li> <li>Conduct small group sessions in grade-level team meetings (Zoom)</li> <li>Share strategies to implement EI goals into daily classroom practices.</li> </ul>	<b>PLC Teams</b>	<b>EI self-assessments tools</b>	As needed by the principal, district leader, school counselor
<b>December-January</b>	<b>Classroom: Supportive Classroom Environment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom teachers work with students to establish shared agreements</li> <li>Grade level teams meet after developing shared agreements to debrief</li> </ul>	<b>PLC Teams</b> <b>Classroom teachers</b> <b>Students</b>	<b>PLC Rubric</b> <b>Schoolwide rubric</b>	As needed by the principal, district leader, school counselor

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate schedule for teachers to visit other classroom for observe strategies</li> </ul>			
<b>December-January</b>	<p><b>Continuously Improve Schoolwide EI Implementation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The teams work with classroom teachers to survey students on their perception of classroom climate and analyze results and plan during grade-level team meetings.</li> <li>The teams conduct learning walks throughout to collect observational data on the progress of EI implementation</li> <li>The teams summarize, review, and share staff and student survey data and walk through observations.</li> </ul>	<p><b>PLC Teams</b></p> <p><b>Classroom Teachers</b></p> <p><b>Students</b></p>	<p><b>PLC Rubric</b></p> <p><b>Schoolwide rubric</b></p>	As needed by the principal, district leader, school counselor
<b>January-February</b>	<p><b>Classroom: Supportive Classroom Environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose evidence-based EI program for the school</li> </ul>	<p><b>PLC Teams</b></p> <p><b>Principal</b></p> <p><b>Families</b></p> <p><b>Community Partners</b></p> <p><b>Student Representatives</b></p>	<p><b>PLC Rubric</b></p> <p><b>Schoolwide rubric</b></p>	As needed by the principal, district leader, school counselor
<b>March-May</b>	<p><b>Classroom: Supportive Classroom Environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Principal communicates the selection of EI program (Zoom, Newsletter)</li> <li>Plan of program rollout and professional learning (Online, Face to face)</li> <li>Purchase materials for pilot classrooms and teachers</li> <li>Pilot teachers attend initial training (Zoom; live video conferencing)</li> <li>Pilot teachers provide feedback on training and coaching.</li> <li>PLC teams meet with the principal to identify an EI period in the bell schedule for the following school year and ongoing professional development (Zoom, live video conferencing)</li> </ul>	<p><b>PLC Teams</b></p> <p><b>Principal</b></p> <p><b>Classroom teachers</b></p>	<p><b>PLC Rubric</b></p> <p><b>Schoolwide rubric</b></p>	As needed by the principal, district leader, school counselor

<b>March_May</b>	<b>Continuously Improve Schoolwide EI Implementation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback reviewed from pilot teachers</li> <li>• Teams conduct end of the year update results on implementation rubric and classroom surveys of pilot classrooms</li> <li>• Develop short term goals for the following school year</li> <li>• Implement evidence-based program with fidelity</li> <li>• Continue strengthening staff EI and relationships</li> <li>• Develop and align community partnerships to support EI</li> </ul>	<b>PLC Teams</b>  <b>Principal</b>  <b>Classroom teachers</b>  <b>Community Partners</b>	<b>PLC Rubric</b>  <b>Schoolwide rubric</b>	As needed by the principal, district leader, school counselor
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Based on <https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/the-casel-guide-to-schoolwide-sel-essentials/>

The PLC above is just a guide for the implementation of an emotional intelligence program in the St. John Berchmans School community. It is a process that will go beyond one year. The method of choosing the appropriate emotional intelligence program depends on the needs of the school community and the students. The design of plans is not the same, and the selection of such programs are built on student data and need. The ease of delivering a quality emotional intelligence program virtually must be taken into consideration as well.

### **Conclusion**

So, should the development of Emotional Intelligence be a goal in our modern education? Should we provide emotional support for our students upon the reopening of our schools? Should our faculty and staff be trained to help students manage their emotions and channel their feelings? The answer is a definitive, yes! As a teacher and a mother to a child with autism spectrum disorder, this interruption of his progress was unfair and hard to swallow. Even though we tried as a family to make the transition to distance learning as seamless as possible, we could not compare to the structure and the support of his school community. My son struggled to fill the void that was left, and we, as a family, struggled with him. His learning disability already

hindered the development of his emotional intelligence. Alongside our school community, we had worked countless hours, days, and years to build up the development of his emotional intelligence, and we still have many years of milestones to meet. My son, like many others, lost the structure, the resources, the support, and the socialization he so desperately needed.

As I sit here and reflect on the impact this pandemic has had on my family and me, I think of my students. I think of the little boy who is the hugger, the one that needs a bit more affirmation to know he is loved and cared for. I think of my student who needed that extra, "you can do it" and "Don't give up" encouragement every day just to make it through the school day. I think of my students that lived for recess and lunchtime just to be able to interact freely socially and bond with their fellow peers. So many children with so many different understandings of the world around them. How is it that we can reopen our school without taking into consideration that we will be getting back our students changed and broken? Some may be happy to be back in school, and some may be too scared to come back with the fear of catching this illness. As we plan to reopen our schools, we have to consider not only the precautions of maintaining social distance and sanitizing workspaces; we also have to think of the impact this has had on all of us emotionally.

As we live amid this pandemic and the uncertainty that lies within the next school year, I am concerned for the mental well being of all our children. By providing that extra support and resources to our teachers will help make the transition a lot easier.

In the words of Daniel Goleman, "What matters for success, character, happiness, and long life achievements is a definite set of emotional skills – your EQ — not just purely cognitive abilities that are measured by conventional IQ tests."

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