



SEL NEWS

From the APCSD Social Emotional Learning Team

Spring is a great time to work on wellness in AP!

Algonquin Middle School held their Warrior Wellness Wednesday on March 9th. The Averill Park High School is in the middle of a week of wellness topics culminating in break out sessions during the last block on Friday, March 25th and the elementary schools will use the first week in May for a wellness theme week. With all the talk about wellness, we thought it would be a great time to share some perspectives on wellness and the connection with social-emotional learning. We hope you will find the information and links in this newsletter helpful.

Kind regards,

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What is Wellness?

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines wellness as: the quality or state of being in good health especially as an actively sought goal (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wellness>). The Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) states that “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” and the National Wellness Institute uses pieces of both and defines wellness as “an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence” We many not have control over all aspects of our health but we if we embrace wellness as an active process, we can work toward improving our physical, social and emotional wellbeing to the best of our ability.



https://www.medicinenet.com/what_is_health_and_wellness/article.htm

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4535518/>

<https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/major-themes/health-and-well-being>

The Connection Between SEL and Wellness

The Collaborative for Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) states “While SEL and mental health are not the same, SEL can promote positive mental health in many ways. By promoting responsive relationships, emotionally safe environments, and skills development, SEL cultivates important “protective factors” to buffer against mental health risks.”

(<https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/how-does-sel-support-your-priorities/sel-and-mental-health/>) We'd go one step further and say that well developed social emotional skills help strengthen both emotional, social and physical wellbeing. The ability to be self aware, regulate emotions, develop healthy relationships, take other perspectives and make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns and social norms certainly has an impact on our whole wellbeing. If you are interested more on the core competencies of SEL, please check out the AP District website <https://sites.google.com/apcsd.org/teaching-and-learning/social-emotional-learning> or this short video from CASEL which provides a good overview of the five competencies.

▶ SEL 101: What are the core competencies and key settings?

Games, Nature, Exercise, Art and More: What's the Connection to Wellness?

If you strolled through Algonquin Middle School on their recent Warrior Wellness Wednesday, you would have seen students learning about the cycle of anxiety, discussing how to support a friend with mental health challenges or learning to relax the mind and body through yoga. You would also have seen students playing board games, learning to finger knit, coloring, engaging in an intense fitness session, bucket drumming or strolling outside looking for signs of spring. Some might wonder what all this has to do with Wellness. We know from years of research that students need more than information. They need explicit instruction and opportunities to practice so a session like “The Cycle of Anxiety” provided students with information on how to recognize anxiety, opportunities to explore times they might have felt anxious and practice using breathing methods to identify and manage their thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Yoga provided an opportunity to focus on the mind body connection and practice breathing and movement to change thought and thought to change breathing and movement. But what about activities like board games, knitting or drumming?

Research on the SEL and wellness is clear that having the ability to regulate emotions, thoughts and behaviors in different situations is a critical skill that helps us successfully navigate life's ups and downs and that establishing and maintaining positive, rewarding relationships with others leads to a greater sense of well-being and to engage in less risky behavior. Games are a great way to practice managing the emotions that come with success and frustration as well as connecting with those we might not otherwise seek out. Research shows that having hobbies is directly connected to reduced stress, higher positive affect and improved mental and physical health. Finding a hobby that fits us, however, requires some exploration, an open mind and a little trial and error. Games like cribbage, pinochle and other card games reduce stress by actively focusing the brain on another task and challenges the brain to think in different ways. Games where mistakes are welcome and pressure is low help to remind us mistakes are okay and laughter is good. Having a variety of Wellness day activities gives students an opportunity to explore without committing and to learn about what others enjoy. It's a great way to build some of those social emotional skills!

Interested in learning more about hobbies and wellness? Check out some of these articles:

- <https://extension.usu.edu/mentalhealth/articles/how-hobbies-improve-mental-health#:~:text=Improved%20mental%20health%3A%20hobbies%20that.and%20a%20lower%20heart%20rate.>
- <https://www.healthgrades.com/right-care/mental-health-and-behavior/best-hobbies-for-mental-health>
- <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-importance-of-hobbies-for-stress-relief-3144574>
- <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-328X/8/5/49>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2863117>

Looking for fun ways to foster social emotional learning through games and hobbies at home?

▶ Why Practicing Can Help with Emotional Regulation

▶ Let's talk about Self-Management

Games for Elementary Aged Students:

▶ 5 Incredibly Fun GAMES to Teach Self-Regulation (Self-Control) | Social Emotional Learning

Sleep, Mood and Self-Regulation

Sleep and emotional regulation go hand in hand. As part of Wellness Day/Week activities Algonquin Middle School and Averill Park High School students will have the benefit of hearing from Chris Reddy, a member of the High School science faculty, about the benefits of sleep and its impact on brain function and emotional regulation. His talk is titled, *How to make school easier and bad things less bad*. We are hoping that Mr. Reddy's engaging talk will lead to some interesting conversations at home. Here's an interesting article on the connection between sleep and mood:

<https://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/need-sleep/whats-in-it-for-you/mood>

It is important to establish good sleep habits early on in life. This is sometimes easier said than done. Here is a video that does a good job of showing us how to initiate sleep training and how to set healthy sleep boundaries.



<https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/03/health/how-to-get-your-kids-to-sleep-wellness/index.html>

For our older students, smartphones, computers, and other devices interrupt sleep and can impact mood. Here is a video on how smartphones may be impacting sleep.

<https://www.cnn.com/videos/health/2014/08/01/cnn-orig-living-to-100-dr-sanjay-gupta-digital-detox.cnn/video/playlists/life-but-better-sleep/>

What is Social Emotional Learning?

Social-emotional learning 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.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) provides a framework for social emotional learning centering around 5 main competencies. Circling the five competencies are the key settings where students live and grow. APCSD and CASEL agree that "Families are a child's first teacher and an essential factor in the cultivation of social and emotional competencies throughout a child's life. When schools and families work together, they can build strong connections that reinforce social and emotional skill development." Our goal as a school is to partner with families and the community to help students become their best selves.

