CREATING WELCOMING, CARING, RESPECTFUL & SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Building Social Emotional Competencies: Choosing Instructional Resources

Creating welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments requires a shared commitment among school staff, students, families and community partners. As part of an intentional, coordinated approach, schools may use an instructional resource or program to build students' social-emotional competencies. Research indicates that the most effective resources engage students in multiple opportunities to actively learn and practice social-emotional learning skills (SEL) with adults and peers.

Local school jurisdictions have the flexibility to select and approve the resources teachers use in their classroom and may choose among the resources on the Education authorized resource lists (www.education.alberta.ca/apps/lrdb/). Beyond this, numerous resources are available on topics such as bullying prevention, conflict resolution and preventing dating violence. Quality resources support teachers to design S.A.F.E tasks (sequenced, active, focused and explicit) to meet students' needs in their local context. Social-emotional competencies are included in many Alberta Programs of Study, primarily K-9 Health and Life Skills as well as Career and Life Management in high school.

PREVnet (Promoting Relationships, Eliminating Violence) notes the importance of using evaluated resources to avoid having a negative impact on student success and well-being. The following criteria are provided to guide schools in selecting an evidence-informed program or resource.

Criteria	Does the program or resource meet the criteria?
Whole-school, multi-faceted approach	Includes information, strategies and tools to: ☐ Engage families. ☐ Establish effective links with community partners/services. ☐ Engage students as leaders in the school-community. This is especially important at the adolescent age. ☐ Foster a positive school-wide learning environment.

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Criteria	Does the program or resource meet the criteria?
Variety of teaching methods for increasing, knowledge, promoting positive attitudes and developing skills	☐ Provides ample opportunity for students to develop and practice social-emotional skills in meaningful situations (eg. Role play, Think-Pair-Share, etc.). ☐ Provides accurate information and opportunity to think critically about social norms and develop decision making skills. ☐ Accommodates diverse learning needs and styles.
Provides opportunities to develop positive relationships	☐ Focuses on increasing healthy behaviors and positive relationships rather than decreasing negative behaviors (strength-based). ☐ Messaging is positive (no shame, blame or humiliation). ☐ Does not focus narrowly on prevention without the larger context of healthy relationships/ human rights.
Developmentally appropriate	☐ Program goals align with the developmental stage of the students (eg. teaching adolescents strategies for healthy dating relationships and young children strategies for self-regulation).
Socio-culturally relevant	☐ Program fits (or can be easily tailored to fit) the community context and cultural norms. May include information, resources or activities for support.
Sufficient length and duration to impact student learning	☐ Based on a sequenced, active approach to learning skills, attitudes and information. Explicitly targets social emotional competencies. ☐ Opportunities are available to reinforce learning (and adapt skills to changing developmental stages and experiences) across grade levels.
Evidence-informed practices	☐ There is strong and reliable evidence from at least one rigorous and unbiased evaluation that documents positive impacts on student knowledge, attitudes and/or behavior.
Well-prepared, skilled educators	☐ Teachers, peers or community educators have participated in program training. They understand the program's theoretical basis and are well prepared to implement sequenced, active instructional strategies. (*administrative support and active participation by the teacher are critical if a community educator is leading instruction). ☐ On-going support, resources and / or learning opportunities are available to build the capacity for school staff.

criteria from Nation. M., Crusto. C., Wndersman, A., Kumpfer, K.L., Seybolt, D., Morrissey-Kane, E., & Davion, K. (2003). What works in prevention: Principles of Effective Prevention Programs. American Psychologist, 58(6/7), 449-456.

Reviewed programs/resources can be found at:

Public Health Agency of Canada. *Canadian Best Practices Portal---Preventing Violence.*

Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Guide to Effective Social Emotional Learning Programs (K-12)

National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices