

Focus203

While Future Focus was designed to gather community input for strategic planning and the strategic blueprint, key themes and priorities that emerged throughout the process indicated a strong community concern and value around the Social and Emotional Health and Well-being of our students. As a result, District 203 launched the first Focus 203, a topic-specific engagement session targeting social and emotional competencies.

A total of 157 parents, school, and community participants attended one of two different sessions. Superintendent Dan Bridges; Supervisor of Social Work Services Rachel Weiss; and Naperville Central High School Social Worker Amy Barth presented key concepts and facts regarding the social and emotional status evident in our community, schools, and society as a whole. Parents and guests then were invited to work in small groups to identify what they felt were the greatest concerns and greatest needs in their child's social and emotional development. Groups were asked to identify the social/emotional skills and competencies needed for healthy students and families as well as to suggest strategies and priorities for programming and support to aid all stakeholders.

Task #1:

Identify Greatest Concerns/Needs in Child's Social, Emotional Development

Sifting through the small group responses from participants, several broad categories of concerns and of needs emerged:

Greatest Concerns:

- How to develop competencies for self-management, self-awareness, self-esteem and self-confidence that can be utilized in all settings.
- How to teach and develop coping skills related to resiliency and perseverance.
- How to identify and manage physical stress and emotional anxiety tied to high expectations and internal, family, and school pressure to succeed.
- How to develop an awareness of the influence of peers, either in acceptance by peers ("fitting in") and/or pressure to bully or disrespect other cultures.
- It should be noted that the evening session, in particular, articulated strong concerns about the role of social media and the need to educate students and parents on social media use, limits, and ramifications.

Greatest Needs:

- Assist parents, staff, and community with the concept that mistakes/failure are a part of life. This presents opportunities for learning and building resiliency throughout a child's educational journey and social/emotional development.
- Build knowledge and strategies for parents, students, and staff around problem-solving and coping skills.
- Provide coaching ("mentoring") at home and at school.
- Help students develop the confidence and skills to self-advocate.
- Provide opportunities to grow and shine within families, school and the community untethered to grades and athletics.

Task #2

Specific strategies to develop core competencies at home, school, and in the community.

Small groups identified many paths to cultivate resilient children, from emotional supports to more concrete activities and programs.

Home Strategies:

- Encouraging and modeling healthy habits; emphasizing wellness, less stress, more “down time,” and open communication.
- Celebrating success of all kinds and providing support without judgment.
- Curbing parent ambitions and examples of poor behaviors.
- Creating avenues for connecting and networking for both parents and children.
- Teaching self-advocacy methods.

School Supports:

- Programming that explicitly focuses on stress management and SEL from primary grades on up.
- Programming that teaches problem solving and coaching that encourages goal-setting.
- Activities that go beyond academics and athletics in order to build self-esteem and social skills.
- Encouraging, nurturing and mentoring children with a focus on, “Be the best you can be,” rather than perfection and high achievement.
- Help and resources for parents – and training for staff – in SEL and other parenting tips.
- Across-the-grades (developmentally appropriate) program coordination and communication home.

Community Supports:

- Opportunities in the neighborhood and community that boost social connections (parenting resources, parent and/or student groups, preschool outreach).
- Mentoring opportunities for parents and students through apprenticeships, service programs and internships.
- Activities that encourage life balance and family togetherness.
- A broadened awareness of SEL through education forums (school and park district) and through faith-based organizations, community groups, staff and parents.

Task #3:

Finals thoughts:

Self-Awareness is identified as the greatest concern to be addressed at home, at school, and in the community.

Communication between home and school about programs, implementation plans, and resources identified as the primary need to address concerns.