

Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Skill-based learning is an important part of a comprehensive approach to prevent ACEs. Decades of research shows that teaching children and youth skills to handle stress, resolve conflicts, and manage their emotions and behaviors can prevent violence victimization and perpetration, as well as substance misuse, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and teen pregnancy.

There are a number of approaches to teach skills. Social emotional learning approaches (also referred to as universal school-based programs when delivered to all students in a particular classroom, grade or school) are widely used across the United States to enhance interpersonal skills. This includes skills related to communication, problem-solving, alcohol and drug resistance, conflict management, empathy, coping, and emotional awareness and regulation.

Adults and Activities Relationships with caring adults who are positive role models can prevent ACEs and improve future outcomes for young people. Caring adults could include teachers, coaches, extended family members, neighbors or community volunteers. Connecting youth to caring adults and activities helps to ground them, improve their engagement in school, and establish positive networks and experiences. It is an important preventive strategy to buffer against parental absence or other difficulties at home, frequent moves, and exposure to negative influences at school and in the community. It can also buffer against the impact of ACEs for youth who have already experienced ACEs.

Mentoring and after-school programs are ways to connect youth to other caring adults and activities. Mentoring programs pair youth with an adult volunteer with the goal of fostering a relationship that will contribute to the young person's growth opportunities, skill development, academic success, and future schooling and employment outcomes. Mentoring programs may be delivered in a school or community setting and to youth of all ages, from early childhood through adolescence.

After-school programs are a way to provide opportunities for youth to strengthen their behavioral, leadership, and academic skills and become involved in positive school and community activities. Programs range from those offering tutoring and homework assistance to more formal skill-based programming and structured learning activities. These programs also address other key risk and protective factors for high-risk behavior by providing adult supervision during critical periods of the days, such as between 3:00 to 6:00 p.m., when youth crime and violence peaks. Mentoring and after-school programs can reduce the prevalence of crime, violence, and other adolescent risk behavior and pave the way for positive outcomes in adulthood. Evidence Research suggests that mentoring programs improve outcomes across behavioral, social, emotional and academic domains. Other benefits include improvements in academic performance, parent-child and student-teacher relationships, and parental trust. Opportunities to develop and practice leadership, decision-making, self-management,

and social problem-solving skills are important components of after-school programs with documented benefits.

Source: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: on and Control Division of Violence Prevention

The Center for Citizenship and Social Responsibility

We have a program in Medford Public Schools (Medford MA) that addresses, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), anxiety, hopelessness, bullying and increasing empathy in our society. I would appreciate it if you would take a few minutes to read about the program and consider sharing our story to encourage other schools to consider establishing a similar program. Since the CCSR is based on project based learning which allows students to create projects that benefit the community and the world, I would like to discuss how we could work together to develop a CCSR in your district.

The Center for Citizenship and Social Responsibility (CCSR) is a district wide after school program that is dedicated to making the community and the world a better place to live. At each school, there is a CCSR advisor who guides students in the development and implementation of a project that helps the community and/or the world to be a better place to live. The students select a project that is important to them and helps others. They work individually and in small groups, usually two or three students, to plan and complete the project in the course of a school year. By supporting students with the proper learning activities, we can: prevent them from becoming addicted to harmful substances, develop positive self-awareness, encourage teamwork and cooperation, improve self-esteem and develop leadership skills.

The mission of the The Center for Citizenship and Social Responsibility (CCSR) is to develop responsible global leaders/citizens that will be positive contributors to society who will address social issues such as addiction, racism, depression, suicide, bigotry etc.

We believe by incorporating real life experiences (PBL) for students to work on projects to help others will have a lasting positive effect on their self-image and understanding of others. Over the past four years, over 2000 students have participated in our mini-courses, clubs and activities, and most importantly community projects (over 200 projects completed).

Using the Project-Based Learning (PBL) methodology, students gain knowledge, learn to problem solve and develop leadership skills. This is accomplished by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging and complex issue, problem, or challenge. Since PBL incorporates real life experiences for students, by working to help others, the learning has a lasting positive effect on their self-image, self-confidence, ability to empathize and understanding of others. This experience provides students with a Positive Childhood Experience (PCE) which may counter the effects of an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE). Research shows that the

more Adverse Childhood Experiences children endure the greater the negative impact on their mental and physical health.

Our instructional methodology benefits students four ways:

- develops important leadership skills
- increases a positive self-image and self-confidence
- counters Adverse Childhood Experiences
- experiencing natural high from helping others

PBL projects that students have completed in the past three years are located at

- Initiating and passing a ban on plastic bags in Medford
- Raising \$4,000 to create a permanent monument to enslaved people who died in Medford
- Installing a 3D crosswalk at the Brooks Elementary School
- Collecting and delivering a truck full of supplies to victims of Hurricane Harvey in Houston
- Medford's Diversity Day - a student-run festival to celebrate the diversity and inclusion
- Created and implemented a Walk for Veterans and raised over six thousand dollars
- The English Learners Give Back Program created a user-friendly website where English Learners can learn how to perform basic tasks around Medford High School
- Restorative Justice project provided an opportunity for students to talk about all sides of the conflict and be accountable for their actions
- Raised funds, purchased and installed an electric car charging station at Medford Vocational High School

Student created projects are the major focus of the CCSR also provides SEL support for the school district:

- Motivational speakers, such as Dr. Sanjiv Chopra Harvard Medical School, Dr. Robert Brooks, Clinical Psychologist, Harvard Medical School and this fall, Richard Blanco, renowned poet
- Mini-grants for classroom projects
- Field experiences
- Supplies and materials for students, faculty and staff that support our mission
- CCSR web site and Blog

In addition, The Center is working with school administration to develop a system-wide initiative to integrate social-emotional learning, citizenship, resiliency and social intelligence into the district curriculum and activities.

Student-created projects are the major focus of the CCSR; however, the CCSR also provides SEL support for the school district. We provided motivational speakers such as Dr. Sanjiv Chopra of Harvard Medical School, Dr. Roberts Brooks, a Clinical Psychologist,

and Richard Blanco, a renowned poet, who will speak this fall. In addition, when aligned with our mission, we have provided mini-grants for classroom projects, field experiences, and supplies and materials for students, faculty, and staff.

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