

Skills for School. Skills for Life.

The mission of the Safe & Caring Schools (SCS) program is to create sustainable, positive systemic change by infusing social and emotional learning (SEL) and character education into daily academic instruction from preschool through grade 8. This takes place in partnership with educators, counselors, administrators, parents, and community members to improve academic achievement and school climate.

“When you educate the whole child, you can count on academic growth as well, even if that’s not the primary intent.” These words from “The Whole Child,” a 2007 report from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, reinforce the value of social and emotional learning. SEL is no longer seen as an option to be taught separately from academics; rather, it can be taught and implemented in schools in a number of ways.

SCS supports the idea that reaching the hearts of children is equally as important as reaching their minds. As one teacher explains, “I have learned that if I want my students to succeed academically, I need to teach them how to listen, follow directions, communicate effectively, resolve problems, and make good choices.”

Teaching kids life skills needs to become part of the daily routine. Learning to get along with others, accepting responsibility for one’s own actions, and making better choices takes practice and needs the guidance and ongoing support from the adults in kids’ lives. Consistency and repetition, as well as modeling desirable behaviors, will increase students’ ability to internalize and use new skills in real-life situations.

Research Foundation

For several years now, there has been a growing body of scientifically based research supporting the idea that enhanced social and emotional behaviors can have a strong impact on kids’ success in school and, ultimately, in life (*Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning: What Does the Research Say?* Edited by Joseph E. Zins, Roger P. Weissberg, Margaret C. Wang, and Herbert J. Walberg. Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2004). The research substantiates that effective strategies for educational reform involve (1) a central focus on school climate change and (2) infusing SEL into regular academic lesson plans. Giving children a balance of intellectual and emotional instruction leads to more complete psychological development and helps them become better learners. This idea is supported with hard data. For example, The Lucile Packard Foundation for Children’s Health and the William T. Grant Foundation funded an analysis of 207 studies of social and emotional learning programs involving 288,000 elementary and secondary students from a cross section of urban, suburban, and rural schools. The results of the analysis are summarized in a 2008 report, “The Benefits of School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Programs” from CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning). In evaluating academic outcomes, the study found that in schools where SEL is integrated into the regular programming, students scored 11 percentile points higher on standardized tests compared to students in schools not using an SEL program. Even though incorporating SEL activities required time in the school day, it did not negatively affect students’ academic performance; rather, time spent on SEL improved academic performance. This project, conducted by Joseph A. Durlak of Loyola University in Chicago and Roger P. Weissberg at the University of Illinois at Chicago, was the first meta-analysis of research on the impact of SEL programs on students. Their full report is titled *The Effects of Social and Emotional Learning on the Behavior and Academic Performance of School Children*.

SCS incorporates a holistic approach in working with children, combining several research-based strategies into one program in order to nurture the whole child and promote student well-being. SCS defines student well-being as “the development of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors that maximize students’ functioning in environments where they live and work—school, home, and community” (Romano, J. L. *Journal of Educational Research*, 90, 1996). SCS provides you with a comprehensive set of core materials to enhance student well-being in a manner that is easily infused into your daily routine.

SCS materials incorporate a strengths-based approach that fosters resiliency in children to enable them to thrive and become successful in school and in life. Recent research shows that focusing on strengths is one of the key elements in supporting our youth, and schools play a critical role in the development of the strengths or assets in students.

As Bonnie Benard writes in *Resiliency: What We Have Learned* (San Francisco: West Ed, 2004):

A framework, research support, and a rationale for resilience-based prevention and education include the following assumptions:

- *Resilience is a capacity all youth have for healthy development and successful learning.*
 - *Certain personal strengths are associated with healthy development and successful learning.*
 - *Certain characteristics of families, schools, and communities are associated with the development of personal strengths and, in turn, healthy development and successful learning.*
 - *Changing the life trajectories of children and youth from risk to resilience starts with changing the beliefs of the adults in their families, schools, and communities.*
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SCS uses a complete and comprehensive plan that makes sense and works.

- It complements and enhances the well-being of children by promoting self-awareness, self-respect, integrity, and compassion to help them become productive citizens of any community.
- It encourages students to take risks and become active learners, regardless of their abilities, language barriers, or cultural differences.
- It leads students to make connections with the world around them by practicing the skills they need to face daily challenges.
- It allows students to realize their potential as positive leaders by providing social and emotional education as part of academic learning.

SCS activities support standards and comply with best practices for SEL infusion at school while providing opportunities for you, the teacher, to use your creativity. When aligned with the key competencies of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the SCS activities clearly address those key SEL competencies: 1) Awareness of self and others, 2) Positive attitudes and values, 3) Responsible decision making, and 4) Social interaction skills.

These SCS materials have been tested with teachers and students of all abilities and backgrounds in public, private, city, and suburban schools. The program has been successful due to the commitment of staff, ongoing support from leadership, and awareness that all student needs—emotional, social, and intellectual—must be met. The schools that had the most success with the program developed strong relationships with their students by infusing SCS principles into the culture of the school, rather than just using occasional add-on SEL or character education units. At these schools, teachers brought the activities to life by modeling desirable behaviors and creating an environment where all students felt safe, accepted, recognized, and celebrated for their individuality every day.

A Schoolwide Commitment

To improve classroom and school climate, the SCS materials can be used by an individual teacher or by an entire school or district. Either approach will work, but a systemic change can be realized only when an entire school makes a commitment to become a safe and caring place. By choosing the schoolwide approach, a school has the benefit of teamwork and support from all staff, plus parents and community members. Through the common language of clear expectations, consistency of messages, modeling of desirable behavior, and the use of vocabulary that will help everyone communicate more effectively, you will be able to create positive systemic change in your school.

To implement a schoolwide SCS program:

- Include social and emotional learning in your mission statement.
- Establish clear expectations for positive behavior.
- Be consistent with expectations and consequences.
- Establish a yearlong plan to reinforce parent involvement.
- Create a support system for all students, staff, and parents.
- Coordinate communication among all staff, including teachers, specialists, administrators, counselors, support staff, substitute teachers, and aides.
- Plan opportunities to recognize and celebrate successes.

Although classroom teachers are the primary implementers of the SCS lessons, administrators, counselors, social workers, health teachers, and other staff can be actively involved in the effort to infuse SEL into all areas of the school. Creating a schoolwide program takes thought and planning, but it's well worth the effort.

“We’ve seen a significant change in the attitude and the behavior of students. Our suspension rate has dropped, and the infraction rate has dropped significantly. The infraction rate in a sense is the day-to-day business of what’s going on in school, and I can see that there’s a change. All of these small infractions added up is a big problem, and decreasing them has made a big difference.”

PRINCIPAL—TARBOX SCHOOL

Content Overview

Students learn best when they see how what they are learning will impact their lives. The more your students can relate to a situation through experiential activities, the more interest they will show in the lesson and the easier it will be for them to apply the skills in real-life situations. This Safe & Caring Schools resource guide includes activities that enable students to have conversations, to learn through inquiry, and to feel empowered to change their own behavior and contribute to the creation of a positive classroom and school culture.

SCS MONTHLY THEMES

The SCS materials provide a sequenced, yet flexible program for social and emotional learning (SEL). Activities are grouped into nine units, one for each month of the typical school year. A theme is designated for each month, so all grade levels using the program have the same monthly theme. This allows each grade level in a schoolwide program to use its specific age-appropriate activities to support the common theme throughout the school. The SCS monthly themes are the following:

SEPTEMBER—Me and My Safe & Caring School

OCTOBER—Discovering Our Feelings

NOVEMBER—My Support System

DECEMBER—Respect Yourself and Others

JANUARY—Bullying

FEBRUARY—Teaming Up for Success

MARCH—Conflict Resolution

APRIL—The Power to Choose

MAY—Follow Your Dreams

Each SCS monthly theme is presented in a brief overview with key objectives to help focus the teaching. The theme is developed with a broad range of literature-based teaching activities, complete with reproducible activity sheets for the students. For easier printing of the activity sheets, they are also available on the CD-ROM included with this book. See pages 12–13 for the “Year-at-a-Glance” chart of all the activities within each monthly theme.

LITERATURE BASE

The SCS activities use children’s literature to introduce key concepts, facilitate discussion, and lead into the activities. Using the books promotes active listening, helps increase comprehension, and motivates students to express themselves. The literature connections directly integrate SEL into core academics, making it easy for teachers to “build in” rather than “add on” SCS practices. Check your classroom, school library, or local public library for the books, or acquire some of the titles to start building an SEL library to share with all classrooms. When a suggested book is not available to you, consider another book of your own choosing or simply discuss the key concept of the book as it is described in the lesson plan.

LESSON PLANS

Each activity is presented with simple directions that include the “Learning Objectives,” the “Materials Needed,” and a four-part teaching plan: “**READ,**” “**DISCUSS,**” “**DO,**” “**RELATE.**” In “Read,” a book related to the activity topic is suggested for shared reading. “Discuss” develops the topic through guided discussion of the book. “Do” provides instructions for using the lesson’s activity sheet. “Relate” offers ideas and discussion prompts to connect the topic to the students’ daily lives, and these ideas can be good writing prompts for journal entries.

The activities are designed to be used as starting points to introduce the key concepts of a safe and caring school. With open conversation, kids will gain a better understanding of the concepts and a sense of ownership of their own growth. See pages 12–13 for the “Year-at-a-Glance” chart of all the activities within each monthly theme.

INTEGRATED ACTIVITIES

In addition to the more than 100 lesson plans, ideas for integrating each monthly theme across curricular areas—language arts, literature, art, music, and math—are provided to follow up and expand on topics.

ASSESSMENT

Best practices include ongoing assessment for program mastery. The final activity sheet for each month is a short quiz to assess the students' grasp of the concepts related to the monthly theme. Three types of questions and a writing activity are included. You may choose to use a quiz as a pre- and post-test to demonstrate where students started and how far they have grown by unit's end.

YEAR-ROUND ACTIVITIES

To support the success of a schoolwide effort, a set of activities that can be implemented at the start of the school year and used throughout the year is included (pages 7–9). These activities provide the school with a common vision and language that will maximize the benefits of the SCS program.

SCS Implementation Plan

The SCS activities have been successfully used in home-rooms, regular classroom settings, during advisory time, and as part of before- and after-school childcare and various youth or club programs.

Classroom teachers are commonly the primary implementers of the SCS lessons. Materials can be used independently in each classroom, but for systemic change, schools should consider a building-wide program. When all school staff—including teachers, administrators, counselors, social workers, media specialist, aides, coaches, support staff, and childcare providers—are involved in supporting the program, the students benefit from consistency of message and modeling of positive behavior. Schoolwide implementation creates an environment where students know what is expected of them, no matter where they are or what activities they are involved in throughout the day. To support the success of schoolwide implementation, it is essential for all staff to understand the philosophy of the SCS program—its goals, objectives, and action plan—and to be committed to working as a team to create a safe and caring school.

Counselors and social workers can use the program in small, student support groups during the school day, as part of after-school activities, or for parent presentations. In one-on-one situations, the activities can be used to practice specific skills, such as being assertive, using "I-messages," or diffusing negative situations. We have observed counselors and social workers playing a leadership role in promoting a comprehensive approach in the way SCS is used by all staff.

Media specialists and librarians have supported the schoolwide monthly theme by selecting appropriate reading and audiovisual materials for classes. Children can read the books alone, or the media specialist can have read-aloud sessions and discuss how the book's characters feel, express their emotions, deal with conflict, and resolve problems.

An SCS library corner can be set up so staff and students know which books to read to support the theme of each month. Social studies, writing, and art teachers can provide support with SCS theme-based projects.

The Essential Role of Leadership

Children look to the adults around them for guidance, support, and safety. As the leaders of your school and classroom communities, you set the tone for the school year. To create a safe and caring school and achieve long-term positive change, the following strategies are recommended:

In a schoolwide program:

- **Mission.** Identify creating a safe and caring school as a schoolwide goal.
- **Core Team.** Assign a group to oversee the SCS program to keep implementation on track. The core team may be teachers from each grade level or a combination of teachers, administrators, support staff, specialists, and parents.
- **Action Plan.** Create and communicate an implementation plan to all staff, parents, and the community. Keep the lines of communication open so everyone has a voice.
- **Professional Development.** Use training and department planning to enhance the instructional process and effectively use new materials. Plan to train new teachers each year in the SCS program through in-service and teacher mentoring. Provide ongoing support, positive feedback, and a chance to celebrate progress.
- **Comprehensive Approach.** Fully integrate SEL into the daily curriculum and the daily life of students and teachers.

In the classroom:

- **Clear Expectations.** Have students help you create the classroom rules. Their active involvement will lead to positive engagement.
- **Follow Through.** Let students know you are committed to making sure everyone feels safe and has the right to learn and enjoy being in your classroom. Following through shows them you mean what you say.
- **Connect with Each Child.** Get to know your students at the beginning of the year. This will help you build strong, trusting relationships. As you invest in them, they will invest in you.
- **No Tolerance.** Explain to students the meaning of no tolerance for violence, harassment, and negative behavior. Conflicts are a normal part of life, but bullying and harassing others in your safe and caring school are not.

Teaching Tips

There are no simple answers or quick fixes that will create the kind of school community you and your students will want to be a part of every day. But there are a number of things you can do to engage kids in the process of learning to get along with others and accepting responsibility for their own actions. Here are a few suggestions.

BEST PRACTICES

Because the SCS materials are group-graded, plan to meet regularly (at least monthly) with all the teachers using the same book to determine which activities everyone will use. You may want to use some activities at all grade levels to support the schoolwide program, while reserving others for a specific grade level. Keep in mind that some repetition of activities is a good thing because it aids in learning and reinforcing key concepts.

You can take several steps to help make the SCS program successful:

- Become familiar with the material. Review this resource guide in its entirety prior to using it.
- Be flexible. Use your creativity and knowledge to adapt the activities to meet the needs of your students.
- Be positive. Motivate and inspire your students.

- Diversify your teaching style. This SCS resource guide provides you with a diverse range of activities that enable you to work with multiple learning styles.
- Develop a cohesive group of students. Use small groups and pairs of students to complete many of the activities. Vary the way groups are formed—try counting off; odd and even numbers; using colors of clothes, shoes, eyes, or hair; alphabetical order; height; letting students choose (be sensitive to problems of exclusion), or other creative ways.

When lessons have personal meaning to students, they are more likely to change their behavior because they want to, rather than because they are told to do so. To motivate your students and make the lessons personal, keep these best practices in mind:

- Help children understand the new skills and why they matter to them.
- Demonstrate what the new skill looks like, sounds like, and feels like.
- Create opportunities for children to practice their new skills.
- Consider the use of journal writing to help kids personalize their new skills.
- Use teachable moments to correct and redirect children.
- Celebrate the students who adopt desirable behaviors in school.
- Model the new social and emotional skills as often as possible.
- Infuse SEL into academic subject areas.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Involve parents and guardians in the SCS process. Once you establish your classroom and school expectations, send a copy of them to the parents and guardians of all students. Enclose a short letter explaining how the SCS program works in your classroom and school. Explain that you are actively teaching children social and emotional skills along with academics, and include the advantages of doing so. Ask for their support to help children practice the same expectations and skills at home for reinforcement and consistency. Keep the parents actively involved—send home tips, ideas, success stories, and pictures from events at your safe and caring school. Encourage parents to visit your classroom to help with specific activities.

CLASSROOM MEETINGS

Misunderstandings at school, teasing, bullying, or use of inappropriate language can turn into big problems that take time away from your teaching. Be proactive by using classroom meetings (sometimes called “circle time”) to address these issues. By doing so, you create a forum where students can share their feelings, as well as review, process, and discuss ways to positively resolve conflicts.

Classroom meetings give you the opportunity to get to know your students better and allow you to build stronger relationships. Students have the opportunity to practice listening, taking turns, sharing feelings, showing empathy for others, problem solving, and making decisions. Explain to your students the purpose of these meetings and establish clear expectations so students feel safe to participate. You may want to start with these instructions:

- Use active listening.
- Wait for your turn to speak.
- Don’t use put-downs.
- Respect everyone’s feelings and ideas.
- It’s okay to disagree.
- You have the right to pass.

Morning meetings give you a sense of how your students feel, which helps you set the tone for the day. Ask your students to share something that is happening in their lives. This is also a good time to review your expectations and give students a quick preview of the day’s activities.

Midday meetings work well for students who return from lunch, recess, or special events with complaints or hurt feelings. When these feelings are not addressed, they can contribute to the students’ inability to focus on the learning activities.

End-of-the-day meetings cover unfinished business, review the day, celebrate accomplishments, and remind students that you look forward to seeing them the next day. Students who leave school feeling isolated, hurt, threatened, or bullied on a regular basis often choose to skip school. Providing a safe environment for sharing feelings and resolving conflicts in a timely fashion will help the students feel secure and ready to come back the next day. It takes only one caring adult to make a difference in a child’s life.

Emergency meetings give you the time you need to confront issues as they happen so you can go back to teaching and students can complete their day without interference. The key is to be proactive and redirect your students before negative behaviors get out of control.

When students share too much personal information during meetings, explain the difference between private

and public information. Take time to explain confidentiality and the importance of respecting each other’s privacy. If a child refers to anything at home that sounds like an abusive situation, don’t discuss it in class but bring it to the attention of the school administrator.

Year-Round Activities

You will want to implement some or all of these ideas and yearlong activities to build a positive school climate and create a safe and caring community for staff, students, and parents. Implementing these ideas at the start of the year and continuing to use them throughout the school year will support the common SCS vision, language, and expectations.

TEN IDEAS THAT WORK

1. Use grade level or department meetings to review expectations, rules, and support resources, and to discuss other topics related to SCS implementation.
2. Provide a monthly Ambassadors of Peace celebration (see below).
3. Decorate hallways and bulletin boards to promote your safe and caring school. Each month have a designated classroom display some of their completed activities.
4. Use morning announcements to communicate monthly themes and the monthly vocabulary (see first activity of each month).
5. In a parent newsletter, include the monthly theme with tips and ideas for home and family use.
6. Display the SCS Posters (available separately) in classrooms and throughout the school in common areas.
7. Have books related to the SCS themes featured in the library or classrooms.
8. Involve the student council or other student groups in promoting the messages of being a safe and caring school.
9. Use peer teaching by having older students teach monthly activities to younger students through reading, writing, drama, or art.
10. Include school nurses, health teachers, and other school resource people in promoting safe and healthy choices.