

Clayton County Public Schools


Clayton, GA

How SEL Is Preparing High
School Students for College
and Career in Clayton
County Public Schools

Case Study Report 3 of 3



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According to the National High School Center, SEL goals and expectations must include CASEL's core social emotional learning (SEL) competencies including self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness. Clayton County Public Schools (CCPS) stands behind this and makes SEL a priority in helping their high school students prepare for adulthood.

Dr. Ralph L. Simpson, Deputy Superintendent for School Leadership and Improvement, feels that Rethink SEL helps high school students "prepare for adjustments in their lives that will totally transform the way in which they live their lives forever." He believes that they are better prepared to deal with adjustments and that they are in a better position to "make those shifts at a moment's notice as things might change once they go to college, like their major, and difficult and challenging classes that they need." He believes that it has built "resilience and grit" and that they will be "better equipped" for their road into college, career, and adult life. Kim Blackwood, Training Specialist in the Department of Professional Learning, and one of the leads on SEL in the district agrees and says that "no matter what career or path these students take, whether they go to a trade school or a college or whatever they decide to do," Rethink Ed SEL "is a helpful thing" and "is a tool that just makes them more successful moving forward."

Dr. Gloria Duncan, Director of Professional Learning, also thinks that the Rethink Ed SEL curriculum will help prepare students for adult life and help with resilience as well as better responsible decision-making and helps

helps them to reflect on their careers more effectively. The district not only involves parents in career preparation but also brings in local businesses to talk to students and help them explore their options. These businesses and “the community outside of just educators want to get involved in social-emotional learning and all you hear everywhere you go is SEL, SEL, SEL.” She astutely points out that “if you don’t have those SEL skills, it doesn’t matter what profession you’re going into” and without these skills “you’re not going to be very successful.” Kim Blackwood also feels responsible decision-making is one of the most important outcomes from the Rethink Ed SEL curriculum but adds that “responsible decision making is just a natural result when you get competent in the other four areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills” and thinks “it just naturally flows that you’ll make better decisions” and that it fosters critical thinking, resilience, and the growth mindset that anybody needs to succeed either personally or professionally.”

Dr. Duncan also highlights the importance of SEL in preparing students for adult life outside of college and career. She notes how the Rethink Ed SEL curriculum gives students the opportunity to empathize and think about others and helps them to build relationships and have more compassion for others who may be going through something that you are not or who might have a different point of view on things. Coach Krista Lucich, physical education teacher and Chairperson for SEL in her school, says “I wish as an adult, looking back, that there were these strategies taught to us in high school or middle school because they’re lifelong lessons and strategies we need as adults to cope on a daily basis.” She believes that Rethink Ed SEL is “preparing them for stress on a daily basis” and “if they can learn how to manage that” she thinks “they’ll be even more successful than our generation was because they’ll have the techniques, you know, maybe they won’t have to pay \$120 an hour for it.” She “definitely thinks its setting them up for success for managing their life setting goals and that’s so important.” Kim Blackwood completely concurs with Coach Lucich and says “if I had these skills when I was in middle school and high

school, I'd have been a hundred percent more ready for adulthood than I ended up being and it would have probably saved (her) some headaches and heartaches and things of that nature."

Mark Dixon, a senior in high school, also feels that SEL will help prepare him for adult life, particularly in relationships with others. He says that it has "helped (him) learn how to connect with people" and "to step out of that comfort zone and be able to actually push (himself) to talk to people, to learn more about them, and to figure out how to help them, and figure out how they can help him." Dr. Bonnie Waring, Assistant Principal at Lovejoy High School, also thinks that Rethink Ed SEL will help students with relationships and support systems. She thinks "every one of the lessons is just a life building lesson and it's preparing them to be open" and "is preparing them to know that we're not all perfect and you don't have to be perfect and letting them know that we all need somebody" and it's okay "to reach out to somebody."

Dr. Nelson Render, Principal at Lovejoy High School, completely agrees with Dr. Waring and adds that "those tools in the toolbox for each one of our scholars helps them to know how to respond to difficult situations" as well as "how to ask for help, ask for emotional support." He attributes a lot of this learning to the Rethink Ed SEL lessons and states that "the videos have been clear" and the students "really enjoy them, we enjoy them, and (he) really thinks that it helps (their) community to be more like a family." He knows that these skills will prepare students for college and career because they are "going to have all of those critical thinking skills along with relationship skills that they will need to build to continue and move forward for the job and career that they want."

The COVID pandemic has had a traumatic impact on high school students whose visions of high school life such as graduation, proms, sporting events, arts, and having daily interactions with their peers and teachers have been shattered. Rethink Ed SEL is helping them to "be able to be reflective"

and “helping them start to understand how they fit into the broader scheme of things,” according to Dr. Avery Kenly, Teacher Development Specialist. Dr. Simspon feels that Rethink Ed helps high school students “walk away with a skill set that’s going to best prepare them on how to deal with having something taken away from them” later in life after having to have learned to cope and overcome so many obstacles during the pandemic. “They have been deprived of so much but it has also taught them how to value the things that you have right now and hopefully to get to a position where those types of things that you felt as though you may have been deprived of help to look forward to events and appreciate those even more, and to cherish and relish in the moment.”

SEL can prepare all students for adult life including those with special needs. Dr. Kenly, whose background was working with high school students in special education, points out that “when you think about college and career, for many of the students that (he) worked with that had disabilities, many of them had issues with some life skills and some of those traits that help us be successful once we enter the real world.” He thinks that for these students “SEL is perfect because the self-management, you know, making responsible decisions” will help them to “be lifelong learners and productive citizens.” He believes that “if they are lifelong learners and productive citizens, they’re contributors to society” and he calls that a “win.”

Even in middle school, SEL is preparing students for high school and adult life. Dr. Kimberly Dugger, Principal at Kendrick Middle School, thinks that SEL is essential for her students. “one of the issues that middle school students have is self-identity. In many cases, they’re trying to find themselves based on the identity of someone else.” In her school, they use Rethink Ed to “teach students how to identify who they really are and not try to become someone else.” Another crucial component of SEL that Dr. Dugger thinks is important for her students is self-esteem. “If you had an opportunity to come to our school, you will see evidence of activities that our students have completed

about self-love because if you don't love yourself, it's difficult to love someone else, and it's difficult to focus on education if you don't love yourself." The 3rd part of SEL that her teachers spend time working on with students is self-accountability. She explains that "you have to be accountable for everything" and "you need to understand that every action you take impacts those around you, so it just doesn't impact you." Sabrina Stewart, the parent of a middle school student and a Student Engagement Specialist for Lovejoy High School, feels that teaching SEL skills in middle school is very important for preparing students for high school and adult life and that it has even "helped (her) as an adult." For her son, as he gets older, she believes SEL will help him deal with emotions, academics, and challenges in college and his career. She thinks that it helps him to interact with "people in general" and that he "can express emotions and hopefully when he continues with college and career, continue on with that same attitude."

Preparing students for college, career, and adult life requires far more than building academic and cognitive skills or nurturing talents like sports, art, or music. Teaching them self-awareness, empathy, decision-making, self-advocacy, conflict resolution, and other SEL skills may be a better predictor of their future success than other variables. CCPS strongly believes in making SEL the foundation for learning for all students and has watched their students, staff, families, and community grow closer together and work more productively through SEL.



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About Us

Rethink Ed combines the power of technology and research to deliver innovative, scalable, and evidence-based instructional materials and supports for learners with disabilities. The comprehensive suite of tools ensures that every student develops the academic, behavioral, and social/emotional skills they need to succeed in school, at work and in life. Rethink Ed positions educators, students, and families for success. Rethink Ed is a division of Rethink First, a company that aims to place evidence-based treatment solutions in the hands of every educator, clinician or parent working with a child with special needs. We are unique in our footprint, leveraging the power of technology to provide clinical support, best-practice tools, and research-based content to all market segments, reaching more children with special needs than any other solution.

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