Supporting Social-Emotional Learning in DLI Programs: Guidelines for a successful school year in the time of COVID

Objective: To promote students' social and emotional wellness by:

(1) Encouraging the development of social and emotional competencies students need to participate in class effectively and successfully.

(2) Addressing students' mental health needs stemming from the pandemic; such as school closures, lack of interactions with friends, lack of basic needs being met at home, lack of one-on-one educational support, and limited remote access.

Guidance to teachers

- Provide teachers with professional development focused on culturally and linguistically diverse students and families; how to engage and communicate with families in appropriate and meaningful ways; AND culturally sustaining pedagogy.

- When you take away the fact that we gather together in the same building for school, what's left of education? The answer is the relationships that adults (e.g., educators and counselors) have with the students, and the students have with each other. Research has found that fostering strong and positive relationships is a critical component in education, particularly during remote learning.

- Promote positive connections between the school district and their principals and between principals and their teachers. This is a critical context for school reentry. When students feel safe, connected even if they have been struggling with various issues, they will be able to reengage more quickly and more productively with school personnel.

- Teachers can promote connections and caring before educational instruction starts. Purposeful time signaling connection and caring is strongly encouraged. For example, morning meetings are an opportunity to foster community, even if it's on Zoom. During these gatherings, teachers can ask students how they're feeling, and why they're feeling that way, in an effort to build a sense of community.

- Encourage students to support each other. For example, form teams or google groups to facilitate learning and encourage social interaction.

Establish communication channels and improve existing communication channels between school personnel, students, and families.

- Determine how to get information from families in an appropriate and meaningful way.

- Consider making direct contact with the parent(s)/family (e.g. phone call), instead of simply using a questionnaire or survey, to ask three questions:
    1. Do you have any concerns about your child's social and emotional well-being (e.g., engagement, communication, external behaviors)?

2. Would you like to speak with a member of our student services team about your child's social and emotional well-being?
3. In the last few months, has anyone in your immediate or extended family experienced an impacting life event, such as illness, death, or a change in job status?

- Prepare a short help sheet (script) as a guide on making the phone calls and taking notes of parents' responses.

- Ensure the questions are asked in a timely manner (no more than 2 weeks into the school year) and that you have identified who will be responsible to follow-up with families in need.

- Consider the developmental and structural differences of the elementary up through the middle and high schools.

- Create a live-line for phone calls and texts so that families can seek help at designated times. For example, a social emotional helpdesk staffed with multilingual counselors who speak multiple languages; a technology helpdesk would be staffed with multilingual tech support.

- Review and evaluate the recommendations in the context of equity in access, including equity in resources, and supports for the most vulnerable families/students in the schools/programs.

Community/school resource mapping activity

- On a virtual education platform, teachers will be the first point of contact with students.

- Create a "cheat sheet" for teachers of how to connect families with resources, when and if families express needs.

- Encourage teachers to ask families about their community support systems; and if a family needs assistance, encourage teachers to help connect the family with the appropriate resources.

- Establish and/or enhance mechanisms to support the socio-emotional needs of teachers and school-level personnel.

- Identify community members who can serve as bridges to engage the school personnel and that community.

- To maximize existing resources, prioritize resources in the district to serve families—redirecting them to online/digital resources when necessary.