

Integrating Best Practices: A School-Based Approach to SEL

An excerpt from the “Milwaukee Succeeds 2015 Milestone Report”, page 22.

Teachers and leaders at Milwaukee Public School’s Gwen T. Jackson Early Childhood and Elementary School recognized that students were making real progress in reading proficiency with the Milwaukee Succeeds teacher coaching and student tutoring initiatives. But they felt more progress was possible if staff had additional support in addressing many of the student behavioral issues that were evident during the school day.



Milwaukee Succeeds collaborated with a local partner and Community and Social Support Network member, Growing Minds, to work on students’ social-emotional needs. Growing Minds aims to empower students and teachers through the use of mindful awareness skills to create kinder learning environments and more caring school communities. Growing Minds instructors focus on the five core competencies of the CASEL framework: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships skills, and responsible decision-making.

At the end of the 10-week Growing Minds session, staff surveyed the teachers, most of whom were also participating in the Milwaukee Succeeds foundational reading skills teacher coaching initiative. Approximately 8 out of 10 teachers reported that the mindfulness practices were beneficial to students, including an increased ability in themselves and the students to “be more kind” and to “regulate emotions.”

Although Milwaukee Succeeds initiatives at Gwen T. Jackson School focused on children in grades K5 - second grade, Growing Minds staff also worked with third-fifth graders. Some of their comments illustrate the impact stronger SEL skills can have on young people.

“When someone makes me mad, now I listen before I talk.”

“Since using mindfulness, I haven’t had a panic attack in a while.”

“I was a wreck, but mindfulness helped me put it all together. Now I stop and think.”

“With mindfulness, people in my class are starting to realize what they are doing.”