

# *School Psychologists' Role in Addressing School Climate and Adult Trauma*

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# Setting the Stage

- Every day, millions of students—and tens of thousands of educators--bring their traumatic experiences with them to school. Teachers may not always know about the trauma students are experiencing, or know the full details. And staff rarely know the full dimensions of their colleagues' trauma. Under these circumstances, it is not easy for teachers to adapt their instruction in academics, specials, or SEL to meet students' varied and varying needs. However, by creating an explicit connection between SEL interventions and trauma-informed approaches, school psychologists can increase the effectiveness of both types of interventions in schools and help transform the school environment in positive ways.
- The two most fundamental elements of a trauma-informed approach relate to the creation of a positive school climate and addressing the trauma affecting the adults. This presentation will discuss what school psychologists realistically can do to.

How Would You Like ***Your*** Children to  
be Treated in School?

What Kind of Schools Do  
you Want for YOUR  
Grandchildren?



A person is a person  
through  
other  
persons.  
–Bantu



# What Are We Preparing Our Children For: The Context of Resilience



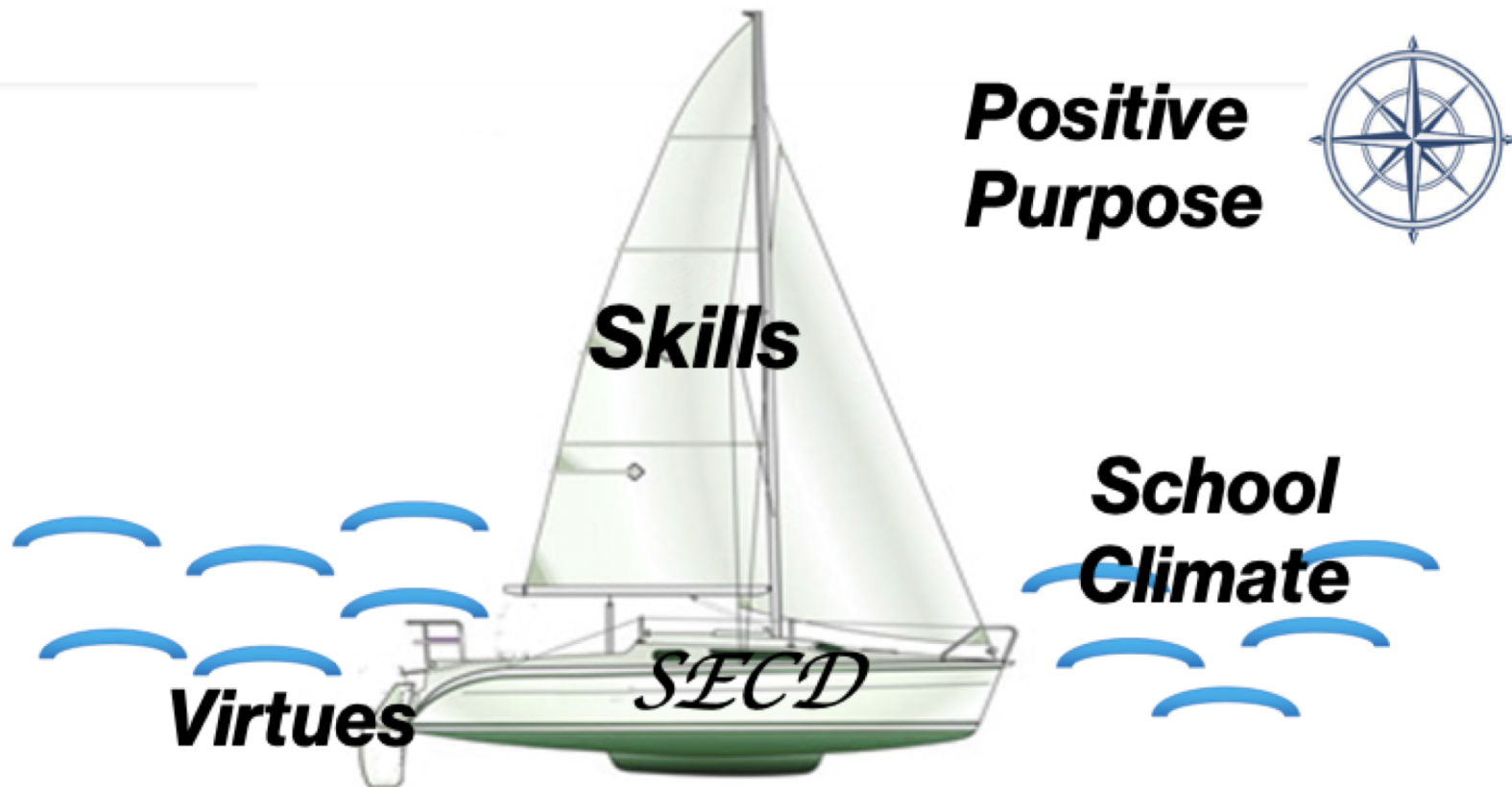
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpEFjWbXog0&t=10s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpEFjWbXog0&t=10s)

One constant will be the importance of caring interpersonal relationships, civil discourse, and a commitment to democratic citizenship and the skills to enact it.

We cannot learn without caring relationships.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/17/opinion/learning-emotion-education.html>

# What is Social-Emotional and Character Development (SECD)?



*SECD helps us reach our positive purposes and helps our valued outcomes to happen*



# “Students Value What They are Taught to Value”- David Adams

*The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the person gifted with reason , but with no morals.*

Martin Luther King, Jr., 1947

*To education a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.*

Theodore Roosevelt, Harrisburg, PA, October 4, 1906

# What are the Elements of Youth Success? Climate, Character, and SEL Competencies

True academic and life success and mental health integrate intellectual, emotional & social facets of learning. These are inextricably interconnected.

Positive,  
Character-Building  
School/  
Family/Program/  
Classroom/Context  
Climate

+

Explicit  
Activation of  
in SEL Skills

+

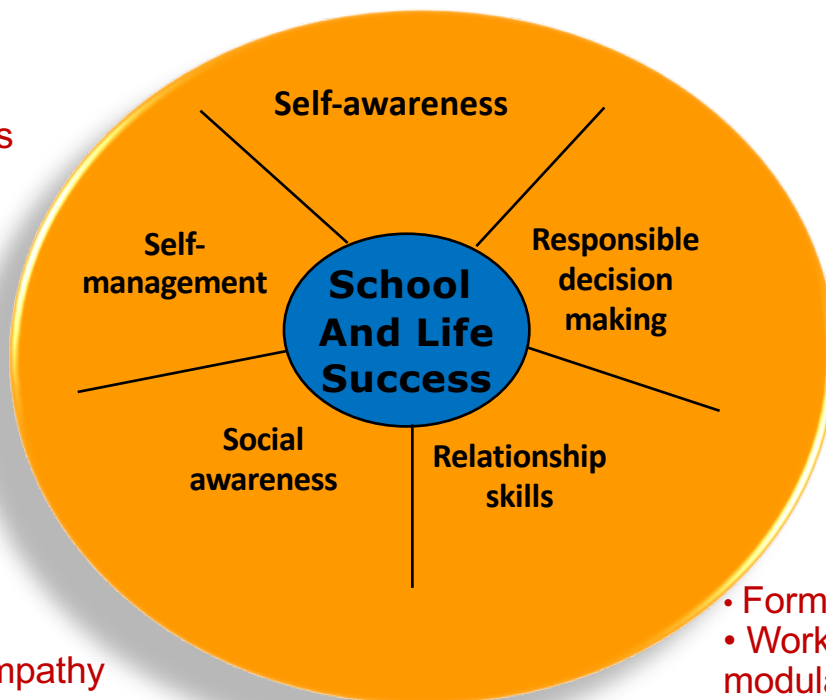
Habits of mind and patterns of thinking that include curiosity, explaining their reasoning, feedback process, asking questions, and defining and solving problems, and striving to communicate clearly and proudly.

# It May Be More Feasible in the Near Future to Focus More on Activating SEL Skills (CASEL 5) Than Putting in Programs to Teach Them— the Latter Requires a Solid 3 Year Planning Window

- Identify one's emotions, values, strengths, and limitations
- Appropriate self-efficacy/growth mindset
- Sense of purpose, mission
- Risk-taking; trustworthiness

- Manage emotions and thoughts
- Establish and achieve goals
- Persevere to overcome obstacles
- Focus and organization

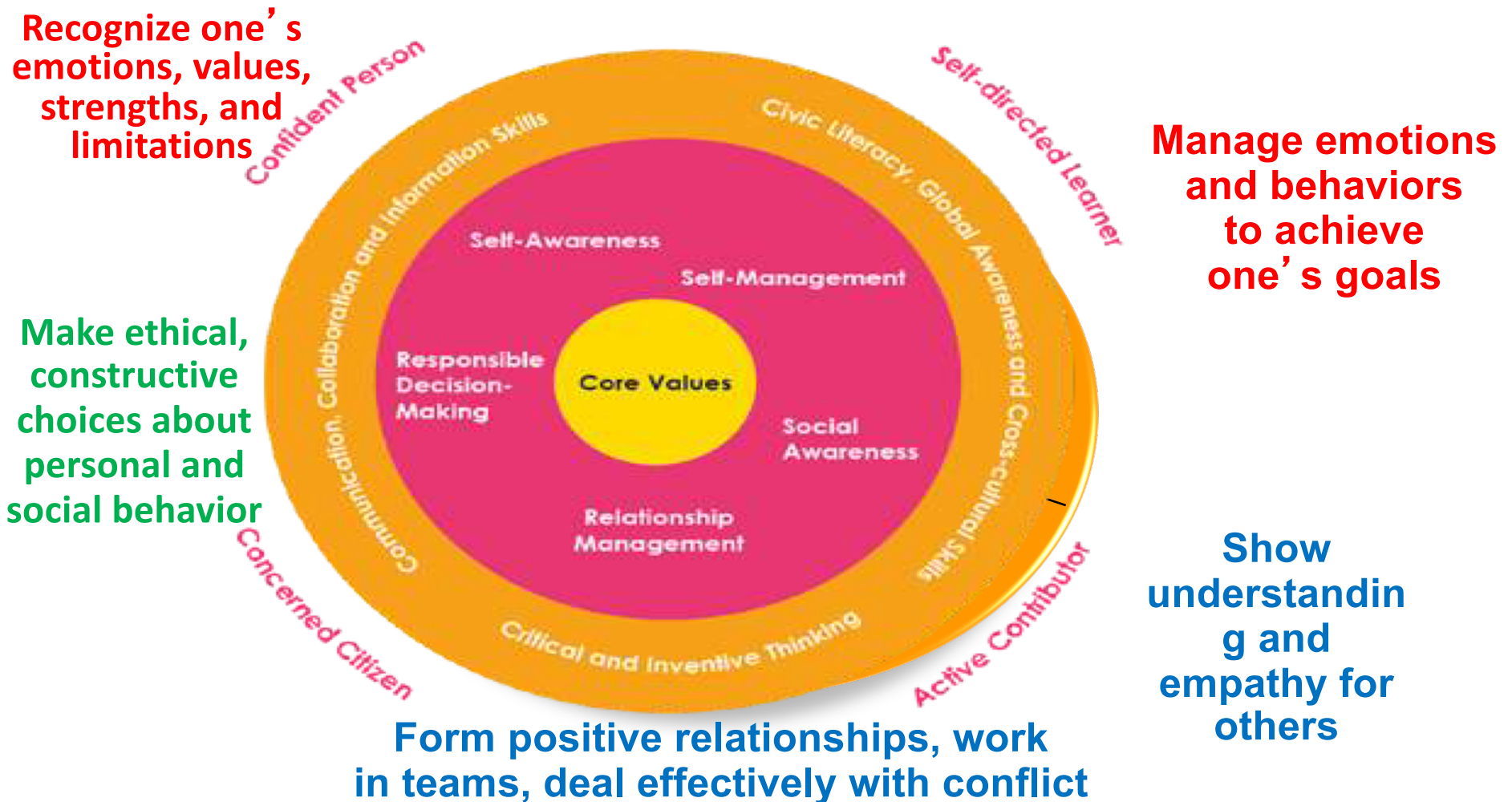
- Identify thoughts, feelings of others
- Take perspectives
- Prevent and resolve conflict
- Show understanding and empathy for others
- Know norms and expectations for different settings, situations



- Effective, ethical problem solving skills, strategy
- Identify many aspects of consequences, including common good
- Evaluate impact of decisions
- Analyze and critique

- Form positive relationships
- Work in groups, teams- modulate
- Deal effectively with conflict
- Positive communication skills
- When and how to give, ask for help; address feedback
- Listening; turn-taking

# Integration of CASEL and CCE Frameworks: Singapore Model of SECD



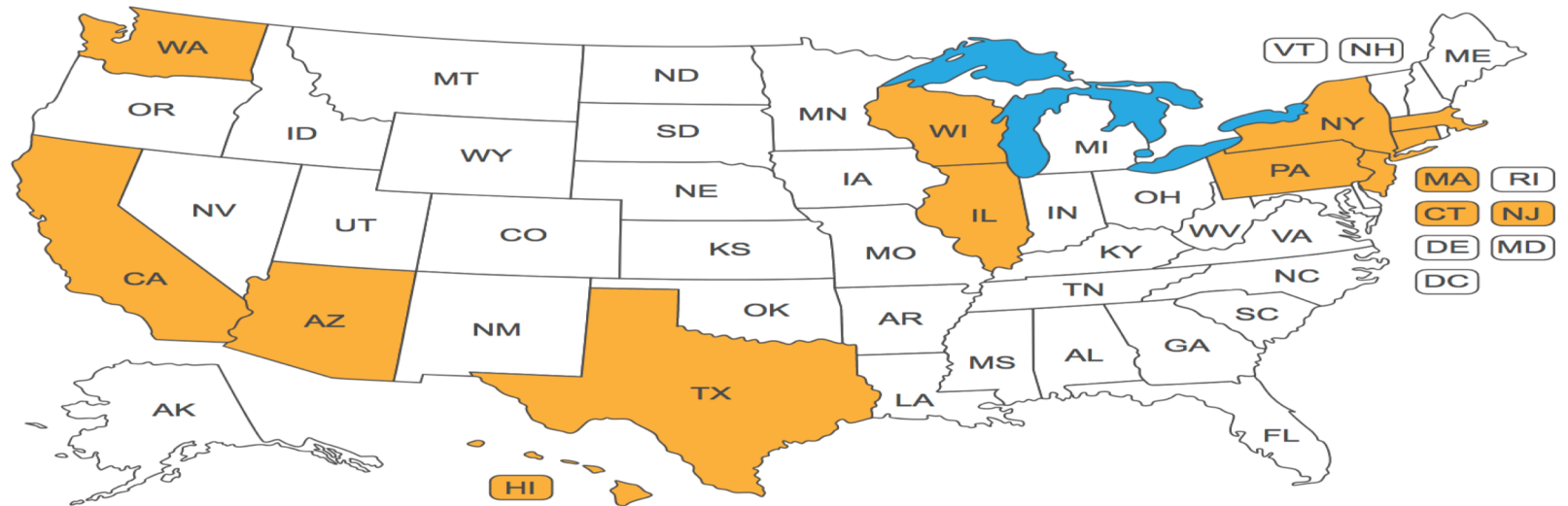
# We Set Our Sights on the Wrong Goals

- **SEL is Essential as Preparation for College Completion and Career Continuity**

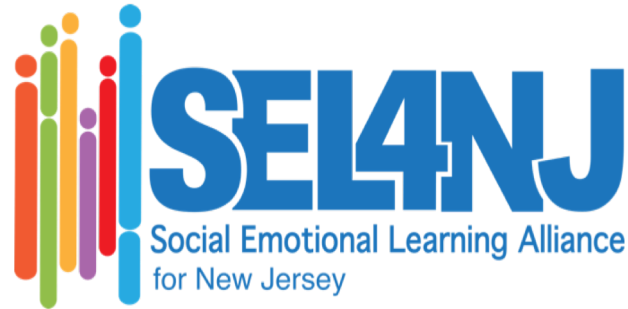


# SEL4US

Social Emotional Learning Alliance  
for The United States



Newly added: SEL4NM, SEL4OR, SEL4VA, SEL4NC, SEI4OH, SEL4SC, SEL4VT, SEL4FL  
International SEL Day– SELday.org March 8, 2024



[www.SEL4NJ.org](http://www.SEL4NJ.org)

[www.NJASECD.org](http://www.NJASECD.org)

Gateway to State and  
National Schools  
Of Character



# #SELday

March 8, 2024

International SEL Day Is A Global Celebration—

Champions unite  
to celebrate SEL



Showcase



Promote



Advocate



Support

In community and  
across social media



Leveraging toolkits  
and earning badges



Together reaching millions around the world

[www.SELDay.org](http://www.SELDay.org)



If You Had a Magic Wand, What Values  
Would You Wish Your Children Would  
Internalize Forever?

- Friendship
- Peace
- Wisdom
- Beauty
- Long Life
- Riches
- Popularity
- Family

# **CHALLENGES OUR YOUTH CARRY AROUND WITH THEM EACH DAY**

- **COVID-19 sequelae**
- **Burdens of racism and inequities**
- **Increased pace of life**
- **Greater economic demands on parents**
- **Alterations in family composition and stability**
- **Breakdown of neighborhoods and extended families**
- **Weakening of community institutions**
- **Unraveling of parent-child bonds due to work, school demands, time, drugs, mental health, and economic burdens**
- **Climate of war, terror, and societal bullying and intimidation**
- **Ongoing exposure to an array of digital media and pervasive advertising that encourage violence as a problem-solving tool and other health-damaging behaviors and unrealistic lifestyles**

# Looking Ahead to Fall 2024

## Continued Emotional & Political Challenges

- Emotions are heightened
- Stress is greater
- Feelings of loss & anxiety are constant
- Relationships are strained
- Creativity is taxed
- Polarization is up & listening is down

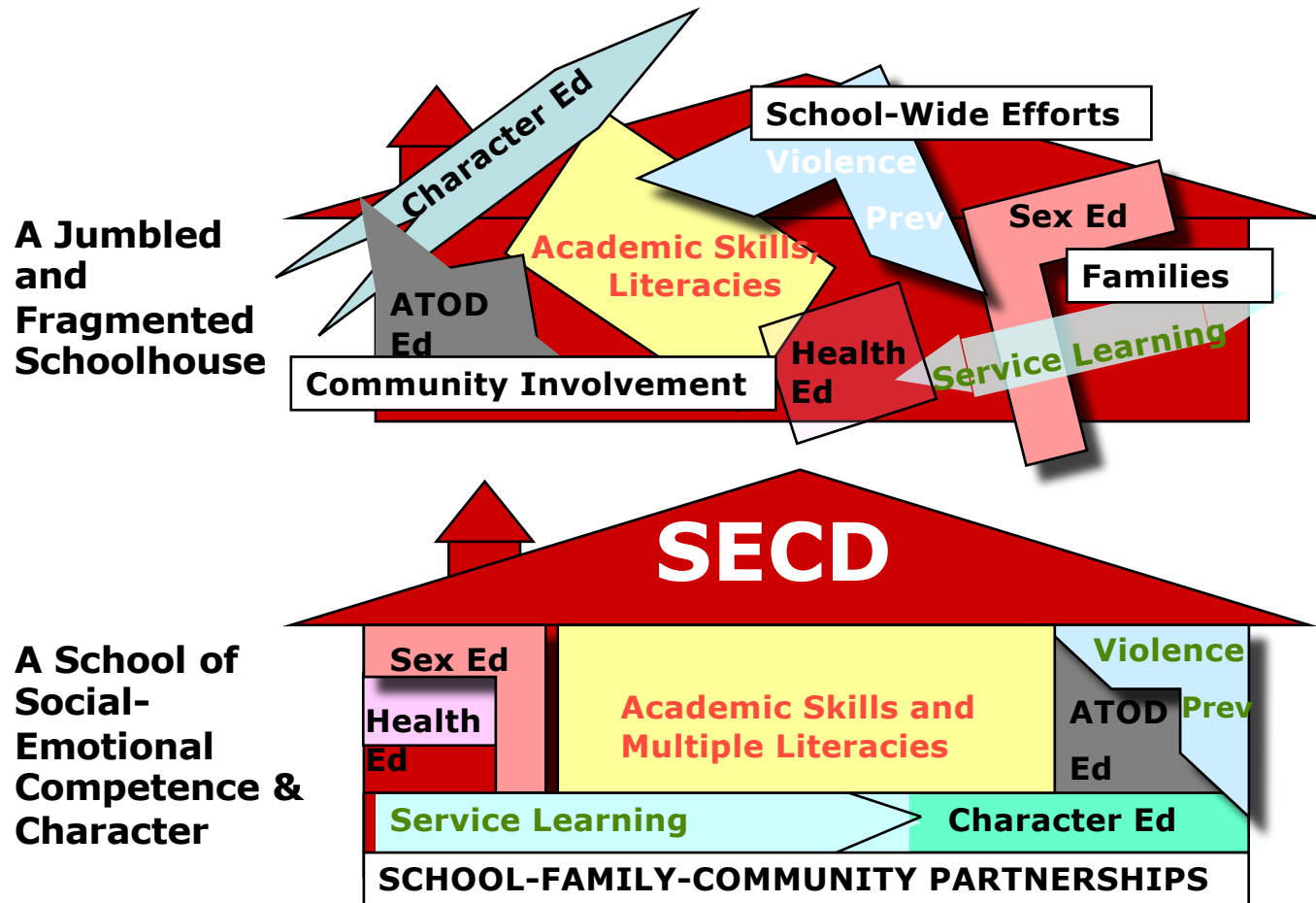


**SEL is More Important than EVER Because  
SEL Helps Valued Outcomes to Happen**

# What Can SP's Do in This Reality?

- Work with individual staff members
- Join/lead school committees that foster a positive climate, toward creating a climate in which we act with respect, challenge, caring, safety, civility and encouragement of opportunity and resilience.
- Work with staff to address the working environment
- Help to create a school of character
- Bring SEL/SECD into all classrooms to improve the interactive climate, promote learning, and create a virtuous cycle that is reinforcing to school staff (next workshop

# When the Schoolhouse is Jumbled, SEL Must be **Added IN**, not Added On



This is especially true in times of volatility, uncertainty, chaos, and adversity– VUCA.

# Leadership in Stressful Contexts

- VUCA:
- Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity (Bennis & Nanus, 1985)
- VUCA Antidote:
- Vision, Understanding, Clarity and Courage, Adaptability (George, 2017)

# Averting the Worst of VUCA

- Remember, VUCA is not new....
- Review Purpose
- Reframe Purpose and Role
- Retool Approach
- Communicate Consistently, Clearly, Openly, and Often
- Promote Contact, Connection, Deepen Community
- Create Space for Diversity and Create Brave Spaces

# Averting the Worst of VUCA

- Be Curious
- Collaborate
- Be Courageous and Compassionate
- Accelerate- adapt, innovate, transform, and lead
- Remember Basics:
  - Keep mind, heart, ears open
  - Look for opportunities



# High-Leverage Coping Strategies

- Regular de-stressing/mindfulness
- Opportunities for reflection/bedside diaries
- Study the problem– e.g., ensure children understand, appropriately, the biology and logistics of COVID and mitigation, other issues
- Be optimistic-- Engage children in positive goal-setting-talk about what you will do tomorrow, the rest of the week, next week-- even small things make a big difference!!
- Have a problem solving strategy to turn to
- For kids AND for caregivers!!

# RAPS: Repeated Application of Problem Solving

- How are you feeling?
- What do you think the problem is?
- What do you want to happen?
- What are some solutions?
- If you did \_\_\_ what might happen? To you? Others? Short/Long Term?
- What idea do you think is best?
- What's your plan?
- How did it work? What did you learn that you can use in the future?

# Rethink Trauma

- All learning must be trauma-informed
- This is a continuum, not an absolute based on SES or race/ethnicity
- *Better: all learning must be emotion-informed*
- Schools must not inflict additional trauma on students
- Schools and communities and wider social institutions are responsible for minimizing trauma and the disproportionality of trauma

# “ All SEL Should Be Trauma-Informed”: *PDK Nov. 2019, v.101 (3), 37-41*

- “Those who design SEL programs cannot assume they will be implemented under the best of circumstances, in schools where past initiatives were introduced with great care and fidelity, and where teachers and staff remain confident in the change process. *Rather, implementation plans should allow for the likelihood that local students are coping with varying kinds of trauma, and that local educators are suffering from some amount of reform fatigue.*”

# “ All SEL Should Be Trauma-Informed”:

*PDK* Nov. 2019, v.101 (3), 37-41

- “That’s why it’s critically important for implementation efforts to be led by at least a few individuals in key leadership positions who are committed not just to bringing SEL into the school but also to pushing through initial obstacles, recognizing that overworked, overstressed, and quite possibly traumatized teachers and staff may be reluctant to sign on to something new (Elias, 2010). **And the more unstable the school environment, the more important it will be for leaders to carve out the time, space, and resources people need in order to become familiar with SEL, air their questions and concerns about it, and become invested in the work. This means that while the urgency is high, the pace of change must be tempered in light of trauma-informed realities. Only slow and steady will win the race.**”

# What is SEL Telling Us *Now*?

## Creating a Climate that Opens the Door to Learning and Mental Health

- We need to be “**seen**” and “**heard**”
- We need to be in a place of sharing, mutual helping and support—a **climate of comfort and respect**
- We need to **contribute**
- We need to be **reassured** and have optimistic future mindedness
- We need to **receive-- and to give--** caring, kindness, help, appreciation
- We need to be **understood with empathy** and compassion—to realize that we are in trauma, beset by strong emotions and worries

# What is SEL Telling Us *Now*?

## Creating a Climate that Opens the Door to Learning and Mental Health

- We need to have things **repeated to us patiently** and caringly, even though we should have heard it before. We need more and tangible prompts/cues/reminders and strategies and lots of reminders, please, because under stress and high emotionality, we don't always retrieve what we know, and we won't always access our best skills.
- We need to be engaged and have energies and talents focused, to **create tangible things we can show**, touch.
- We need **playfulness**, since we know that humor is helpful for creativity and biologically incompatible with stress—(Plus it is better to reduce anxiety and stress indirectly- better and more fun than anger control and stress management)

# Create a Culture of Caring, Kindness, and Helping

- A classroom is a place where students need to be helpful, cooperative, kind, and caring about one another.
- For 180 school days, students enter classrooms wanting to be successful, recognized, valued, and supported.
- With your students, create classroom rules/norms for how to treat one another linked to core values
- **Observe existing patterns of caring, kindness, and helping within your classroom.** Pay particular attention to discussing how students can help one another and seek out help from adults in the school. Make it clear that caring and kindness are the norm, not the exception, and that **no students are excluded from receiving and providing these attributes.**



# Strategies for Fostering Engagement and Building SECD in ***ALL*** Students, Where SP's Can Have a Limited but Powerful Role

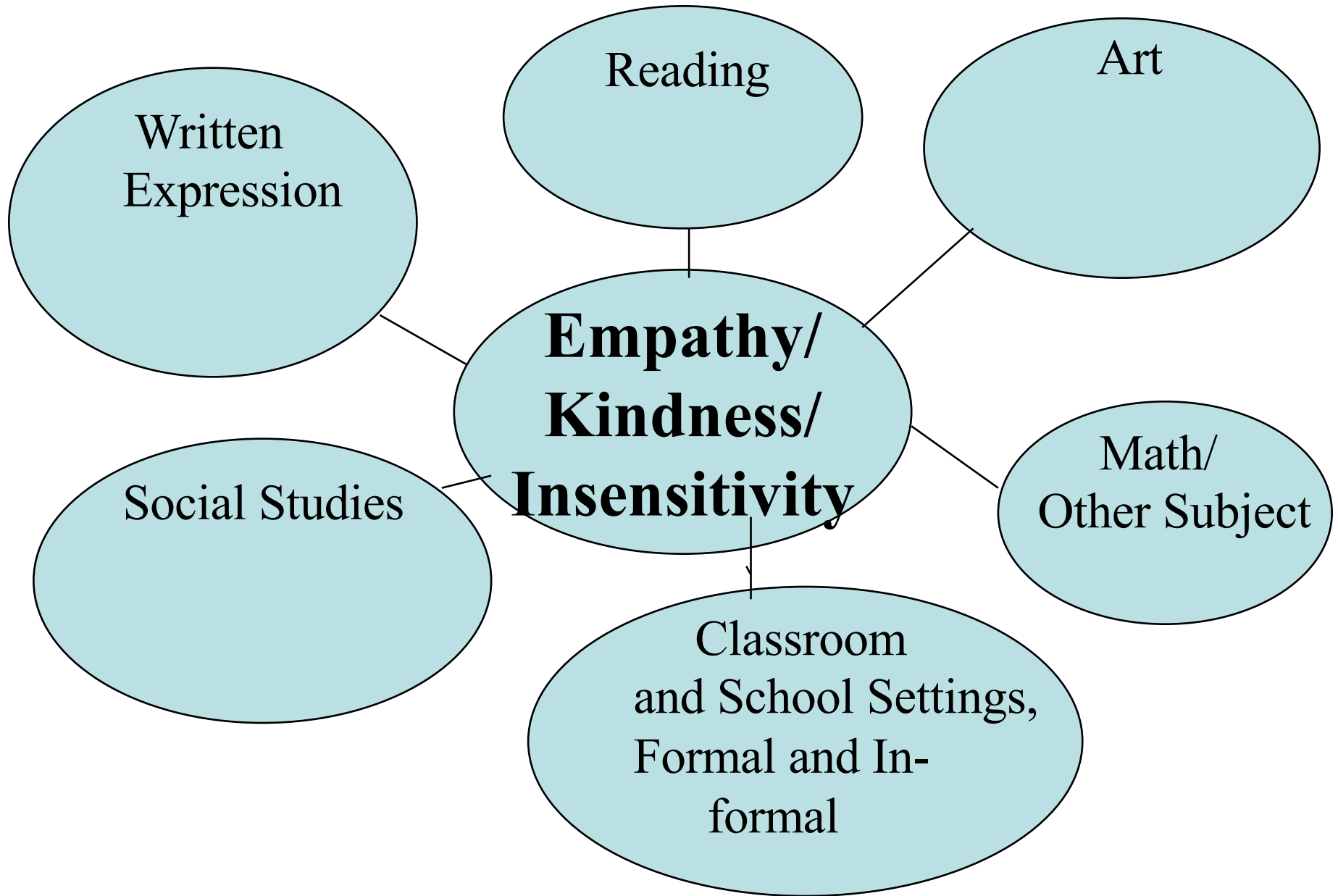
- **Meaningful, Participatory Student Government**
- **Staff/Student Committee Involvement**
- **Buddies, Mentors, and Tutors, across age and ability**
- **Opportunities for Feedback and Reflection**

# Make Sure Students (and Staff) Know the Answers to Empathic Questions

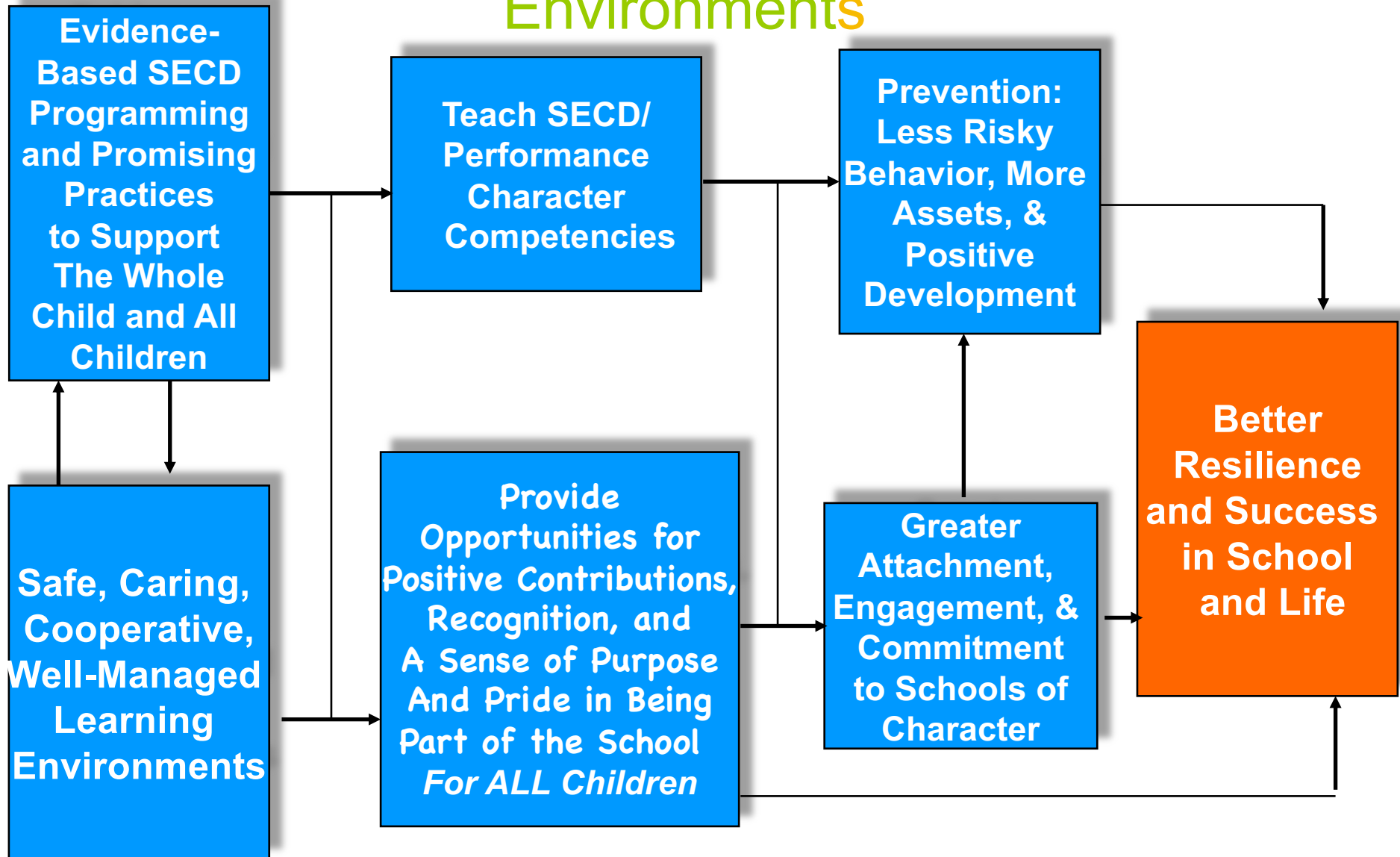
- *What should you do in my class if you are feeling anxious about an exam, assignment, or project? What should you do if you are feeling distracted, saddened, or angered by losses in your life, either past losses or those you are anticipating?*
- *When and how do you learn best? Who are the people you look up to most, in your family, the community, in history, in various walks of life (sports, the arts, government, science, writing, etc.)? Why?*
- *What are examples of hope, heroism, and positive moral conviction and inspiration in your lives right now? Who or what provides this for you and what strengths can you draw from them that you can apply to your everyday life?*



# Keep the Focus on Building a Climate of Empathy and Kindness: Fill in the Blanks



# Resilience Comes from a Confluence of SECD and Supportive School and Community Environments



# Align with Positive Purpose; Inspiration Precedes Remediation

- All children, and especially adolescents, are engaged in a search for Purpose that will continue throughout their lives, as they author their identity through their deeds.
- Each of their big questions-- about purpose, gifts, connection, fears, suffering, and personal spirit-- represents a connection to purpose and meaning and is a driver of deep academic learning.
- *The two most important days of your life are the day you were born and the day you know why.*

Mark Twain

# **Basic to Humanity: Belief in Oneself as an Agent of Positive (Noble) Purpose**

Stanford University psychologist William Damon (2003, p. 9) defines noble purpose:

*“stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of positive consequence to the world beyond the self”*

**Can we see ourselves as the igniters of our children’s purpose, for positive character, contribution, compassion, and citizenship?**

# Human Dignity is the Guide on the Path to Positive Purpose

*It did not really matter what we expected from life,  
but rather what life expected of us.*

Viktor Frankl

*If you believe you are here for a purpose, your  
energies will be focused. A sense of mission will  
give you strength. You will do remarkable things.*

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

*The two most important days of your life are the day  
you were born and the day you know why.*

Mark Twain

# Help Staff and Youth Understand Their Purpose





# Research Foundations of Resilience and SEL

## Support the Circle of Courage

### Resilience Research

#### **Attachment**

Motivation to affiliate and form social bonds

#### **Achievement**

Motivation to work hard and attain excellence

#### **Autonomy**

Motivation to manage self and exert influence

#### **Altruism**

Motivation to help and be of service to others

### The Circle of Courage

#### **Belonging**

Opportunity to establish trusting connections

#### **Mastery**

Opportunity to solve problems and meet goals

#### **Independence**

Opportunity to build self control and responsibility

#### **Generosity**

Opportunity to show respect and concern

### SEL Research

#### **Significance**

The individual believes  
"I matter because we all are interdependent."

#### **Competence**

The individual believes  
"I am an effective problem solving and I can overcome obstacles."

#### **Power**

The individual believes  
"I have efficacy."

#### **Virtue**

The individual believes  
"My life has purpose."



# The Search for Meaning and Purpose (and Mattering)

- Parker Palmer and Rachael Kessler, (1999 issue of Educational Leadership devoted to spirituality) have spent a great deal of time with adolescents and these are among the most frequent questions they have heard:

# Adolescents' Key Questions

- How does my life have meaning and purpose?
- What gifts do I have that the world wants and needs?
- To what or whom do I feel most deeply connected?
- How can I rise above my fears and doubts?
- How do I deal with the suffering of my family, my friends, others in the world, myself?
- What or whom is it that awakens or touches the spirit within me?
- *NOTE: These are the questions that educators are asking as well!! Great foci for staff discussion groups!*

# Laws of Life/Purpose Essays

- What is the Laws of Life/Purpose Essay?  
*The Value of Expressive Writing*
- Case examples: Plainfield Public School District, Plainfield, NJ and *Urban Dreams; MOSAIC in Jersey City*
- Extending the effects into homes and communities
- Multiple Intelligences Adaptations: VPA

# Identify Student's Broad Priority/Value

- What is one rule that you believe is important to live your life by, that gives your life meaning and purpose?
- When you are at your best, how do you act?
- When do you feel best about what you do for others? What is it that you are doing then?
- Think of someone you admire most. How do they live their lives?

# Here is part of an eighth grader's essay about perseverance: Consider the Intersection of SEL and Virtues

- *The key to success in my life is perseverance. My purpose is to continue to reach my goals, despite difficulties that I may face. My great grandmother was a person who struggled to make sure her family would be successful. Born in 1902, she was a maid who worked extremely hard just to make ends meet. She walked miles to get to work because she didn't have money for transportation; after working in someone's kitchen all day, she came home to take in laundry. Her driving desire to make life better for her children and theirs motivated her to persevere in a time when being black meant you were considered less than nothing. (Excerpted from [Urban Dreams: Stories of Hope, Resilience, and Character](#).)*

# Trajectory of Purpose-Related Activities

- *Level One: The Positive Purpose of a Well-Known Individual– via picture book, fiction, biography, social studies, current events*
- *Level Two: The Positive Purpose of a Personally-Known Individual– local hero, community leader, clergy, first responder, family members, educators*
- *Level Three: My Positive Purpose*
- [Principal Kafele https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U98d6CQbz4s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U98d6CQbz4s)

# Formalizing goal-setting in school toward Positive Purpose

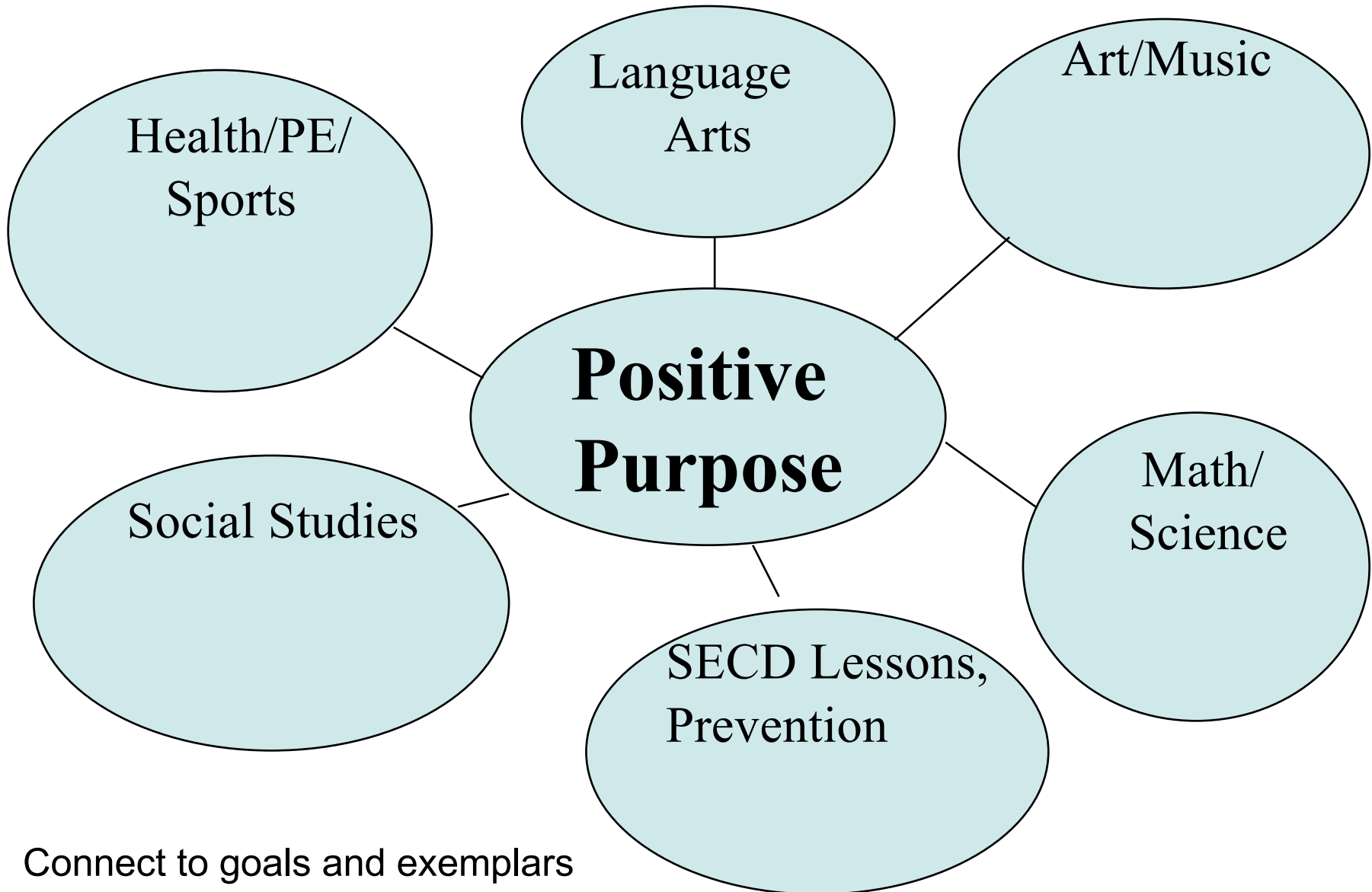
- Set the expectation- do on a half-year or marking period basis-- 3 goals to:
- Make myself better
- Make my classroom better
- Make my school better
- Make the wider community and world better



# Positive Purpose Essay Prompt

- *In your classes and in your life you may have learned about and encountered people with a strong sense of purpose. Similarly, you might feel your own sense of purpose. In a five-paragraph essay, that includes an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion, please respond to the following:*
  - *What is your definition of purpose?*
  - *What might be your purpose? Why?*
  - *How would someone know that is your purpose in life?*

# Integration of Purpose/Other Virtues into Academics: Fill in the Blanks



Connect to goals and exemplars

# Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools: [SELinSchools.org](http://SELinSchools.org)

- Overarching goals are to address the gap in professional development of school leaders and teachers that exists today and to create a community for on-going mentoring, resource support, and sharing of experiences from walking the talk!
- The Academy offers a virtual Professional Learning Community and two certificate programs.
- Certificate for School Leadership in Social-Emotional Learning and Character Development.
- Certificate for Instruction of Social-Emotional Learning and Character Development. ([sel.rutgers.edu](http://sel.rutgers.edu))
- Academy Overview Video: <http://sel.cse.edu/>



Academy for  
**SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL**  
Learning in Schools



# What is the Online Professional Development Community?

- A unique feature of the courses and the certificate is participants' involvement in a virtual Professional Learning Community (vPLC). Beginning with participation in one's classes and practicum, there is an emphasis on being part of a community of learners who support and assist one-another during the courses– and beyond– in making applications of SEL/SECD and academics for prek-12.

# Courage, Persistence, and Support Structures Are Needed to Sustain Resilience and Character

*“Don’t let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.”*

*John Wooden*



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