



CASE STUDY

Buncombe County School District

Through Second Step Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Buncombe found a link between SEL and success in its schools.



Situation

The Buncombe County School District serves the city of Asheville, North Carolina. This highly diverse district is made up of 44 schools, including 27 elementary and 4 intermediate schools, with a mix of urban, suburban, and rural locations. On average, 55% of students qualify for free or reduced-cost lunches, with this percentage reaching as high as 90% in some schools.

The district's leadership team realized that many of its students were experiencing high levels of stress, both in school and at home. The team believed that unless the schools addressed their students' emotional well-being, the students would suffer academically.

In 2014, Buncombe received a three-year federal grant to create a comprehensive school counseling program. A key goal was to build its curriculum around social-emotional learning. The district decided Second Step SEL would give its staff and students a way to recognize and change problematic behavior.

Approach

Counselors led the roll-out of Second Step SEL in January 2015. By the 2015–2016 school year there was districtwide implementation among all counselors. However, the district soon realized that to make a significant change in the classroom, implementing the program needed to evolve from a once-a-week counselor conversation to teaching daily lessons in the classroom.

The change was gradual. Introducing a new curriculum into teachers' busy day was a huge request, but the hope was that hands-on experience would be convincing. What began at three schools quickly spread. Teachers loved how easy the program was to use, and broad changes were swiftly noticed. Although the program is not mandatory, the district continues to receive requests to use Second Step SEL.

Seeking to demonstrate the link between these initiatives and academic achievement, the district implemented the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) in 2016. DESSA is administered two times a year to track school progress in academic and discipline areas. It is also used as a guide to provide additional information for student support.



With the grant in its last year (2017–18), the district is confident that Second Step SEL's sustainability will allow the curriculum to continue to have a positive effect on students.

Outcomes

Results from schools that used Second Step SEL paired with other trauma-informed strategies indicated that they either met or exceeded growth as measured by state achievement tests. These schools also experienced decreased office discipline rates.

Data obtained from DESSA indicated that students at all schools had a significant increase in social-emotional skills, which Buncombe administrators say is likely a direct result of the program as the core social-emotional curriculum. When students move from school to school or grade to grade, Second Step SEL provides a common language for speaking about critical issues.

Teachers report, and the data supports, that improved social-emotional skills are positively affecting student achievement at Buncombe County Schools.

“Don’t be afraid to take a risk. Don’t be afraid to go out there and say this is the right thing to do. Because it’s right for kids.”

David Thompson, Director of Student Services
Buncombe County School District

SOURCES:

Interview: Deborah Lockett, Licensed School Counselor and CLASS (Counselor Leaders Advancing School Safety) Grant Coordinator, 2/10/2017

Interview: David Thompson, Director of Student Services, 2/10/2017

Contact

Research-based Second Step SEL is a universal, classroom-based curriculum for Preschool through Grade 8 that teaches students the skills they need to be safe, succeed in school, and get along well with others.

Learn about more educators’ experiences with Second Step SEL at SecondStep.org/success or call Committee for Children at 800-634-4449, ext. 1.

Who We Are

Though we’re best known for our innovative SEL-centric programs for schools, Committee for Children is involved in all kinds of initiatives to improve the lives of children. Founded as a nonprofit in 1979 to help victims of child sexual abuse, we continue to advocate for policies and legislation to protect kids and provide equal opportunities for all. From our headquarters in Seattle, Washington, we partner with researchers, publishers, and nonprofits around the world. Our programs reach students in over 70 countries, and we work to make sure all children have a chance to thrive.