

**Anchorage School District**  
**Social Emotional Learning to Address Mental Health**

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) involves teaching skills that students and adults need to be successful not only at school, but also at home, in the community, and in the workplace. This includes, but is not limited to, being self and socially aware, having the ability to manage oneself both independently and while interacting with others, listening to perspectives of others, using positive communication, being aware of cultural issues and differences, setting and achieving goals, and taking personal responsibility for learning. Social Emotional Learning is implemented by building relationships through a positive climate, directly teaching skills and strategies, and is infused into daily academics.

The Anchorage School District (ASD) teaches about mental health through its health curriculum and implicitly through implementation of SEL based on District adopted standards - sometimes referred to as “me skills” and “we skills.” The basis of SEL for all schools is creating a safe and respectful learning environment in which students feel connected to the school, adults, and peers. Examples of this work include:

- Building a positive climate in schools where teachers greet students as they enter class and/or have classroom meetings
- Creating social contracts for how to treat each other kindly
- Establishing reset zones or safe spaces where students have the opportunity to regain self-control and reflect on appropriate behavior
- Teachers and staff work directly with students to teach replacement behaviors and have restorative conversations so interactions and learning are productive with peers and adults.

ASD’s K-8 health programming currently includes mental health literacy components. Additionally, evidence-based programs, aligned to SEL Standards, are utilized daily. These District-supported curriculums include *Second Step*, *Connected and Respected*, and *Lions Quest*. They deliberately teach the SEL skills students need for social and academic success. Students who demonstrate challenging behaviors may be experiencing trauma or mental health issues. They receive additional small group or individualized support from a school psychologist, counselor, or behavioral strategist to help them interact with peers and adults and to cope during the school day. Finally, ASD also implements programs such as *You are not Alone*, which is a youth-led suicide prevention and training program, and *Youth Mental Health First Aid* and *Question.Persuade.Refer (QPR)*; these programs teach staff about suicide prevention and how to identify mental health needs of students.