SEL and Digital Learning: Examples from Across Oregon

Philomath Academy

Philomath Academy is an alternative school that serves students in grades K-12. Philomath Academy operates using a hybrid instructional model with students engaging with their learning in the way that best aligns with their needs. On any given day, some students will be attending classes and getting support on-site, some will be participating in live Zoom classes, and some will be working independently with the support of their teachers (some online and others in the flexible learning environment on-site). While there are many things that make Philomath Academy unique, as they have a small student body (approximately 60 total students), they are able to truly provide one-to-one support for students by creating an individualized plan that is generated based on student needs. This process includes meeting consistently with individual students to offer support, both academic and social-emotional, as well as connecting with families as they believe that supporting students includes supporting their families. For the staff at Philomath Academy, it is this commitment to relationship building with students and families that creates the basis for their approach to social-emotional learning – an approach that is integrated within courses, approaches to grading, and the structures found within the school.

This commitment to building relationships with students extends beyond a vision or mission. Each morning begins with an SST (Student Support Team) meeting where all staff sit together to review student data, talk about individual student needs, and develop a plan to support each student. As these conversations focus on each student individually, they shift depending on student need – they might focus on reviewing a student's IEP accommodations and sharing best practices across teachers, developing a system for mental health checks, meeting with the family support liaison to provide additional support, or determining a plan to facilitate a check-in with families. Beth Edgemon, the counselor at Philomath Academy, shared that her role allows her to build deep and lasting relationships with students and families as she is able to meet with students consistently (some every day) as well as facilitate home visits with families. While these home visits have different purposes depending on needs, each Friday, Beth brings pantry boxes to families of students at her school which allows her to both deepen her

relationships with families as well as better understand their needs and how the school can provide additional support.

Digital learning allows the commitments of the staff to be realized in ways that might not be possible in a fully in-person environment. As all students who attend Philomath Academy receive a device and receive support to ensure connectivity, this allows for consistent communication and support to occur both during and after school hours. To staff at Philomath Academy, SEL is integrated into the way they structure their courses, determine their schedules, and create their assessment strategies. One teacher shared that digital learning has allowed more flexible ways to ensure that students' social-emotional needs are met. The digital platforms used at Philomath Academy allow for increased flexibility and differentiated support for students as support can be tailored to what works best for the student and removes any potential obstacles. As teachers know their students, their families, and ultimately their needs, they are able to structure the school day in a way that removes those barriers and supports students. The type of support received can look very different for each student. For example, support might look like any of the following:
- A teacher meeting individually with a student over Zoom to discuss their work,
- A teacher providing support to a student over Google Voice,
- A teacher going to a student's house to work with them in person, or
- A teacher working with students in a flexible educational setting where both new learning and review occurs individually or within small groups.

So what drives teachers at Philomath Academy to do the work they do? Teachers at Philomath Academy are committed to meeting students where they are, creating a space for students to be their whole selves, and bringing culturally responsive teaching methods into the classroom and beyond. What makes this commitment possible is the leadership at Philomath Academy supporting staff well-being by allowing staff to bring their whole selves to their work in order to be the best version of themselves in their own unique and individual ways. Beth shared that the staff love their jobs and their school – the joy coming from knowing that the students are getting everything they need to be successful. It is the kids that bring joy!

Beaverton School District

Beaverton School District, which
serves approximately 41,000
students throughout Beaverton,
Hillsboro, Aloha, and
unincorporated neighborhoods
of Portland, OR has spent the past few years dedicating time and resources to developing an
infrastructure that supports effective and equitable technology integration as well as social
emotional learning (SEL). This has included hiring educators at the district office to support
technology integration and social emotional learning, teachers on special assignment (TOSAs)
and SEL coaches to provide coaching to educators across the district, and TIAs (Technology
Instructional Assistants) at each school site who provide additional support for technology
integration. While technology integration and SEL have varied purposes and needs within the
district, Beaverton has been intentional regarding how they see these two areas intersecting
primarily in the areas of digital citizenship.

At the elementary level, Beaverton School District is using the Random Acts of Kindness
Curriculum to support students' SEL while Character Strong is used at the secondary level. As
teachers and students across the district have become increasingly familiar with technology,
utilizing a digital platform to house the Random Acts of Kindness curriculum has been a key
development in ensuring equity of access for teachers. While the curriculum focuses on SEL
generally, there are several lessons within each grade level that integrate technology through a
focus on digital citizenship, online safety, and respectful online interactions. Character Strong
utilizes technology as a way to increase engagement and social interaction for students through
the use of both independent and collaborative learning opportunities.

As the district has continued to build infrastructure for SEL and technology integration, a focus
on Digital Citizenship training for educators and students has been central to ensuring that
technology is used safely and responsibly. Integrating Digital Citizenship across the district has
included developing a Technology Scope and Sequence that maps the ISTE standards with the
Oregon content standards with future work including developing lessons for grade level bands
focused on SEL with topics include kindness, digital interactions, etc. Further, the district has
utilized the Common Sense Media curriculum, particularly at the elementary level given the
focus on such topics as engaging respectfully online with people who have different beliefs than
you and determining the validity of online sources of information. As Common Sense Media
includes connections with SEL within their Digital Citizenship curriculum, this has provided
educators across the district with a built-in connection between digital learning and SEL. In

addition to educators and students, Beaverton is also engaging parents on digital citizenship issues and has launched a public facing [digital citizenship resource site](#).

At the heart of this work is a focus on equity and ensuring that the curriculum taught and the supports offered are culturally responsive and affirming for students, families, and the larger community. The key for Beaverton is centering student voice. As Kayla McCarley (who currently serves as the Elementary SEL TOSA) notes, within education, the adults are often those making the decisions that most readily impact students, therefore if we are to be culturally responsive, "we have to make sure that we are including all voices instead of reinforcing the same power dynamics of adults making the decisions." Because of a belief in the importance of centering student voice in the classroom, both student voice and student agency served as key aspects of the curriculum adoption process for the new SEL curriculum, which will be implemented this year (Random Acts of Kindness Curriculum at the elementary level and Character Strong at the second level). You can read more about Beaverton's ["Best Practices for Behavioral Health & Wellness"](#) that grounds the work occurring across the district. While there are a plethora of examples of how these best practices are being implemented, one particular example that intersects with technology is the use of student created media. As part of the work of the Future Ready Team at the district, the [Signal to Noise Film Festival](#) is put on each year, which creates space for students to use their voices to tell their own stories. The [examples of students' stories](#) demonstrate the importance of student voice and student agency as an integral part of social emotional well-being.

While the district has spent an extensive amount of time creating learning conditions that are socially and emotionally safe for students, there has also been a focus on supporting the educators in the building through adult SEL and professional learning opportunities. This structure centers on what SEL looks like community wide rather than only focusing on students through supporting adults in developing mutually beneficial relationships with students that move beyond just serving as the teacher, but also helping students to see their teachers as people and learners who are also navigating social emotional learning. As Mason Rivers (who currently serves as the secondary SEL TOSA), supporting teachers in their SEL journeys alongside supporting students creates an inclusive community that is beneficial to everyone. This includes having fun and encouraging laughter and community building among staff and bringing back play, which not only brings joy to students but also to teachers. As the SEL team at Beaverton says, "You can't fix someone else's mask if yours isn't on first."