

Local school-based programs rank among nation's best

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Two locally run teaching programs, which aim to help social and emotional learning in preschool and elementary school classrooms, have been selected among the 23 best in the country by a national education development organization.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has published a guide with 23 programs that it recommends school districts consider adopting.

The list includes Responsive Classroom, a pro-

gram run by Turners Falls-based Northeast Foundation for Children, and PATHS, a program of South Deerfield company Channing Bete.

The CASEL guide — a follow-up to the 2003 “Safe and Sound” report, which has been downloaded more than 100,000 times — lists selected options for schools looking to adopt social and emotional learning programs.

All selected programs aim to strengthen specific qualities in students — such as relationship skills, responsible decision-making, self-management, self-awareness and social awareness.

The idea, the CASEL guide explains, is that improvements made to student behavior and to the overall classroom environment can then in turn increase students’ academic performances.

Responsive Classroom

Responsive Classroom’s main goal is to create a classroom that “allows kids to really buy in and get engaged,” said spokesman Richard Henning.

The class meets daily for a “morning meeting” to discuss news and goals for the day. Teachers provide students

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with several choices on academic assignments, and they work with the class as a whole to create classroom rules and expectations.

Responsive Classroom started 30 years ago at the Greenfield Center School, said Henning. Since then, it has expanded to other regions of the country, he said.

the classroom,” said Henning. “You’re trying to diminish the anatomy of behavioral disruptions ... (and) have engaged learners in the classroom.”

The CASEL guide confirmed that Responsive Classroom improves academic performance, academic behavior and overall climate.

It reports that the program provides extensive opportunities to practice social and emotional skills in the classroom, throughout the school and through homework assignments with family members.

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PATHS

Channing Bete's Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program teaches students how to resolve conflicts peacefully and make responsible decisions.

"When students learn and use (social and emotional learning) skills, behavior improves and disruptions lessen," according to a statement on the PATHS program website. "Instead of wasting valuable classroom time managing misbehavior and providing discipline, teachers can teach and students can learn."

According to the CASEL guide, the program improves academic performance,

increases positive social behavior, while reducing conduct problems and emotional duress.

And like Responsive Classroom, the guide reports that the program provides extensive opportunities to practice social and emotional skills in the classroom, elsewhere in the school and at home.

Channing Bete employees declined official comment about the program's inclusion in the guide.

How programs were selected

The CASEL guide focuses on preschool and elementary school programs. Another guide with middle and high school programs will be released next year.

To be qualified for the CASEL guide, a program had to be a "well-designed and classroom-based" which strengthens students' interpersonal skills.

The program must offer training and ongoing support for faculty members.

And there must be evidence that the program positively affects academic performance or improve other student behavior in the classroom.

CASEL employees thoroughly evaluated each program and conducted email surveys with program developers, the guide said.

To read the full guide, go to: www.casel.org/guide.

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