

# District adopts universal approach to student social-emotional health

Many studies in recent years have concluded that social-emotional health is a critical factor in learning. Students lacking social and emotional health can display disruptive behaviors, inability to form relationships or focus on learning. Students with social-emotional skills are more successful in school and in life. Kindergarten teachers report that about 20% of entering kindergarteners do not yet have the necessary social and emotional skills needed for school, with disruptive behavior disorders (31%), mood disorders (21%), and adjustment disorders (16%); yet less than half of these children receive needed services. Schools have become the de facto location where children receive mental health services; about 75% of children receiving mental health services receive them from school-based mental health professionals. In addition, research has shown that social-emotional skills learned at school lead to greater student success as measured by standardized test scores, behavior, and stress levels.

In 2009, Brighton Central School District established a study group of parents, counselors, and teachers to learn why 7% of their high school students, on average, don't graduate with their class (the 5-year graduation rate is 93%). After many brainstorming meetings, focus groups, and one-on-one sessions, the committee identified social and emotional health as being a key factor influencing a student's likelihood of graduating on-time. At the same time, the district's Wellness Committee was exploring what could be done to support social-emotional wellness—what was being done, how effectively, and what else could be done. When the two groups discovered that they were working on the same issues, they joined their efforts and set out to find a consistent way of measuring and monitoring social-emotional health for all students in the district.

For decades, Brighton has partnered with Children's Institute in the implementation of Primary Project, an evidence-based program targeting social-emotional health in primary grades. Through Primary Project, the district had witnessed the value of the Institute's Teacher-Child Rating Scale (T-CRS). The T-CRS is an assessment completed by teachers used to determine social-emotional needs and competencies of preK-12 students in peer social skills, assertiveness, behavior control, and task orientation. It is also sensitive enough to detect even small changes over time.

## Contacts/Resources:

Dr. Deborah Baker, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction, Brighton CSD, 585-242-5091, [debby\\_baker@bcsd.org](mailto:debby_baker@bcsd.org); Carolyn Rabidoux, Director for Pupil Personnel Services, Brighton CSD, 585-242-5082, [carolyn\\_rabidoux@bcsd.org](mailto:carolyn_rabidoux@bcsd.org); Teale Fox, COMET Product Manager, Children's Institute, 585-295-1000, ext. 271, [tfox@childrensinstitute.net](mailto:tfox@childrensinstitute.net); TCRS website at [www.childrensinstitute.net/TCRS-screening-tool](http://www.childrensinstitute.net/TCRS-screening-tool).



In 2012, Brighton piloted a universal social and emotional screening program as part of its Response to Intervention process. The most important goal is to identify at-risk students. An additional goal is to annually assess every student's social-emotional health to help with program evaluation and professional development to support teachers in the classroom. What started as a project of identifying the social-emotional needs of children K-3 has grown to a K-10 effort for Brighton schools.

Brighton's screening program uses COMET, a web-based data management tool developed by Children's Institute and their technology partner SophiTEC. Teachers complete the T-CRS easily and quickly online (about 2 minutes per child) and the scoring is automatic, allowing data to be accessible immediately. COMET allows the district to analyze their data at all levels – by building, grade, class, and individual student. Tracking over the years provides the district with longitudinal data to identify the best academic and social emotional supports for their students as they grow.

Universal screening for social-emotional health has become a best practice for the district. The system includes early identification and intervention as well as annual screening and monitoring for changes in behavior and social/emotional competence. In this way Brighton aims to improve student services and outcomes so that all students succeed in school and graduate on time.

Children's Institute is a national not-for-profit organization that works to improve the lives of children by strengthening their social and emotional health. Children's Institute is affiliated with the University of Rochester and has served the community for over 50 years.