

Strategies That Work: How Mental Health Drives Academic Achievement

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Agenda

- **Introduction**
 - eLuma:
 - Who we are
 - What we do
 - Cynthia Coufal
 - Brandy Samuel
- **Overview/Purpose of the Session**
- **Connection Between Mental Health and Academic Performance**
- **Reducing Disruptive Behaviors Through Mental Health Support**
- **Practical Approaches to Drive Positive Outcomes**
- **Outcomes:**
 - Improved Performance
 - Increased Achievement
- **Conclusion: Q & A**

Cynthia Coufal



Cynthia Coufal, a teen anxiety coach with over 31 years of experience in education, with 25 of those years spent as a school counselor. Cynthia has dedicated her career to helping young people overcome their worries and obstacles that may hinder their success. She is passionate about guiding and supporting teens as they navigate through the ups and downs of adolescence. In addition to her coaching work, Cynthia also hosts a podcast for young people called *The Teen Anxiety Maze*, where she shares tips, strategies, and stories to help teens regulate their emotions and build resilience.

Brandy Samuell



Brandy Samuell is a dedicated educator with over 32 years of experience. She has been involved in all facets of public education from classroom teacher to assistant superintendent. Brandy's knowledge base spans general education, special education, mental health support, and school turnaround. She has experience working in charter, rural, suburban, urban, and virtual school settings. Brandy currently serves as the Director of Mental Health and Related Services at eLuma Therapy.

Brandy earned a Bachelor of Business Administration, Marketing, degree from Texas Tech University in 1989, and a Master of Education, School Counseling, degree from Texas Christian University in 2002. She has completed Post-Master's work in Educational Diagnostics and Educational Leadership from the University of the Southwest. In addition, Brandy is certified in Critical Incident Stress Management; she has managed multiple school related crises as well as provided crisis management and crisis response training for school staff and community based first responders.

While Brandy has a broad scope of knowledge and interests, the majority of her career has been dedicated to supporting the emotional and behavioral needs of students as well as managing, coaching, and developing staff.

Mental Health & Academic Performance

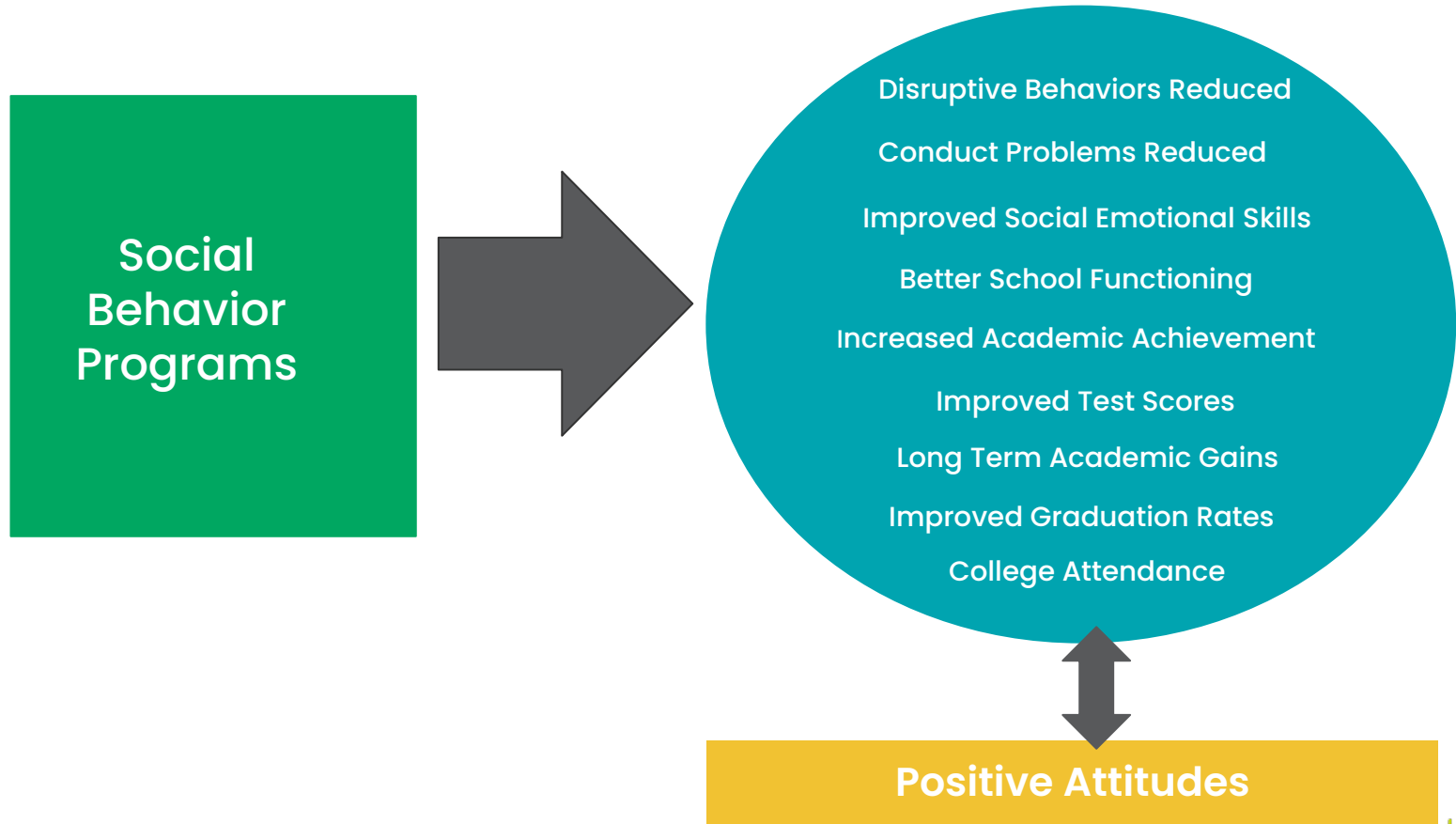
The Connection: Mental Health & Academic Performance

- **Untreated Mental and Behavioral Health Issues:**
 - **Impact on Cognitive Functioning**
 - Concentration
 - Memory
 - Problem Solving
 - Engagement
 - Learning materials
 - Required Tasks

For example:



Emotional Well Being and Academic Success



Case Study: Chicago Public Schools

- A study of Chicago high schools found that those that prioritized social-emotional development saw improved graduation rates and college attendance.
- The study drew data from six cohorts of over 160,000 8th and 9th grade students between 2011-2017.
- Researchers evaluated schools based on their impact on students' social-emotional development, test scores, and behaviors.

- The most effective schools provided a welcoming environment; students felt safe and connected.
- Students at highly effective schools (those in the 85th percentile) saw test scores improve, attendance increase, and disciplinary infractions drop.
- These students also had a 2.41 percentage point increase in the likelihood of graduation and a 2.57 percentage point increase in the chance of attending college within two years of graduation.
- Students were 20% less likely to be arrested on campus.
- PATHS Curriculum (SEL lessons) focused on self-concept, positive actions, responsible self-management, treating others well, telling the truth, and self-improvement.
- A multi year controlled trial in CPS showed that this program yielded positive impacts on student self-reported beliefs about aggression and bullying, parental reports of conduct problems and bullying, and disciplinary actions.

Reducing Disruptive Behaviors

The Link Between Mental Health & Behavioral Issues

- **How Mental Health Struggles Manifest:**
 - Disruptive Behaviors
 - Anxiety-induced Outbursts
 - Depression
 - Withdrawal
- **What is the Function of the Behavior?**
 - **Functions of Behavior:**
 - **To Obtain:**
 - Act out:
 - Attention
 - Access to Tangible Items
 - Sensory Stimulation
 - **To Avoid:**
 - Escape or Avoid:
 - Overwhelming Academic Tasks
 - Social Interactions
 - Feelings of Failure



Addressing Behavioral & Mental Health Issues: Strategies for School Leaders

Train Teachers & Staff

Recognize early signs of mental health concerns.

- Identifying symptoms of:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Other Challenges

Create Safe Spaces for Students

Express emotions and receive support.

- Designated Safe Spaces:
 - Calming Corner
 - Counselor's Office
 - Peer Group

School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions

PBIS to create a positive and supportive culture.

- Teach and reinforce positive behaviors.
- Decrease over reliance on punishment.

Addressing Behavioral & Mental Health Issues: Strategies for School Leaders

Universal Screeners

Surveys and Self-Reports:

- Identify at-risk students
- Provide timely interventions

Social Emotional Learning

Integrate SEL programs into the curriculum to build:

- Emotional Regulation
- Resilience
- Academic Focus

Collaboration

Develop partnerships with community organizations, mental health services, and parents.

- Strengthen Support Systems

Addressing Behavioral & Mental Health Issues: Strategies for School Leaders

Mental Health Awareness

School-wide Whole Child Approach:

- Academic Growth
- Emotional Growth
- Social Growth

Mental Health Vocabulary

For students and staff to foster:

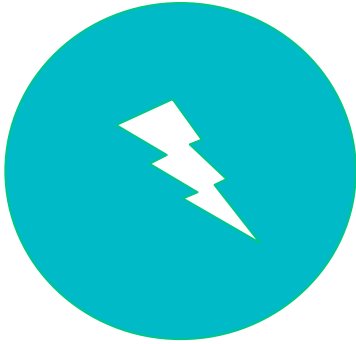
- Empathy
- Inclusivity
- Respect

Open Communication

Promote open communication between staff, students, and caregivers.

- Students feel comfortable discussing their mental health.
- Train staff to manage their own stress and avoid burnout.

Benefits for School Climate

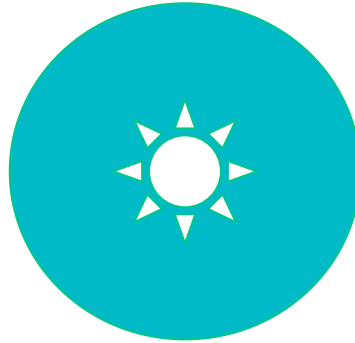


Reduce Classroom Disruptions

Increase focused learning time.

Ex:

- *Lead discussions for decision making
- *Model SEL competencies
 - Empathy, Active Listening, Conflict Resolution, Emotional Regulation



Behavioral and Self Regulation

Allow time for focus and reflection.

Ex:

- *Reflective Journaling
- *SEL Focused Literature



Supportive School Culture

Students feel valued and heard.

Ex:

- *Morning Meetings
- *Practice SEL skills during the day
- *Provide PD for staff

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Practical Approaches to Drive Positive Outcomes

How to Drive Positive Outcomes

- **Early Identification and Intervention**
 - Develop Systems for Identifying At Risk Students
 - Universal Screeners
 - Provide Timely Interventions
 - Direct Instruction
 - Targeted Interventions
- **Social Emotional Learning**
 - SEL Curriculum and Interventions:
 - Improve Emotional Regulation
 - Increase Resilience
 - Promote Academic Focus
 - Focus on Workplace and Postsecondary Readiness
 - SEL Programs / Activities Built Into the School Day
 - Academic Courses
 - Social Competencies Embedded in the School Community
- **Collaboration Across Teams**
 - Holistic Approach
 - Align Academic, Behavioral, and Mental Health Efforts
 - Tiered Support
 - MTSS
 - Partnerships: Wrap Around Services
 - Community Organizations
 - Mental Health Services
 - Families





EXAMPLE of Implementation

Exit Reflection:

Elementary:

- Students draw their face showing how they feel at the end of class/day and one sentence about why.

Middle & High School:

- Use journals or an online discussion board to respond to prompts like the following:
 - What emotion did you feel most today?
 - What strategies did you use when you felt stressed/upset?

WHY?

- **Daily Practice:**
 - Repetition builds emotional awareness.
- **Scaffolding:**
 - Adjust complexity with grade level.
 - Mental Health and Emotional Health vocabulary grows.
- **Teacher Insight:**
 - Valuable data related to students' emotional states.

**Improved Mental Health
Leads to Improved
Performance**

Increased Test Scores

- **Chicago Public School Study**

- Students in effective SEL programs have shown improvements on cognitive tests, with scores improving by 20%.

- **CASEL**

- **Hundreds of studies** involving more than 1 million students worldwide across PreK-12 offer consistent evidence that SEL has a positive impact on students' academic achievement.
 - Students participating in SEL at school have higher levels of **"school functioning,"** as reflected by their grades, test scores, attendance, and homework completion.
 - SEL builds social and emotional skills that **increase student engagement** and lead to improved **academic performance**.
 - SEL interventions that addressed the **five core competencies** increased students' academic performance by **11 percentile points**, compared to students who did not participate.
 - The positive impact on academics lasts long-term: Years after students participated in SEL, their academic performance was an average of **13 percentile points** higher than students who didn't participate.

Reduced Disruptions: Behavior Management Systems

Proactive

- Peer Support: Supportive School Culture
- Mental Health Vocabulary
 - Empathy
 - Inclusivity
 - Respect
- Build a School-Wide Mental Health Plan
 - Form a Mental Health Team
 - Assess Needs
 - Set Goals
 - Comprehensive Plan
 - Evidence Based Programs / Curriculum
 - Allocate Resources
 - Collaborate
 - Assess Impact
- Direct Instruction
 - Skill Deficit vs. Performance Deficit
 - Monitor Implementation
 - Regular Evaluations
 - Make Adjustments



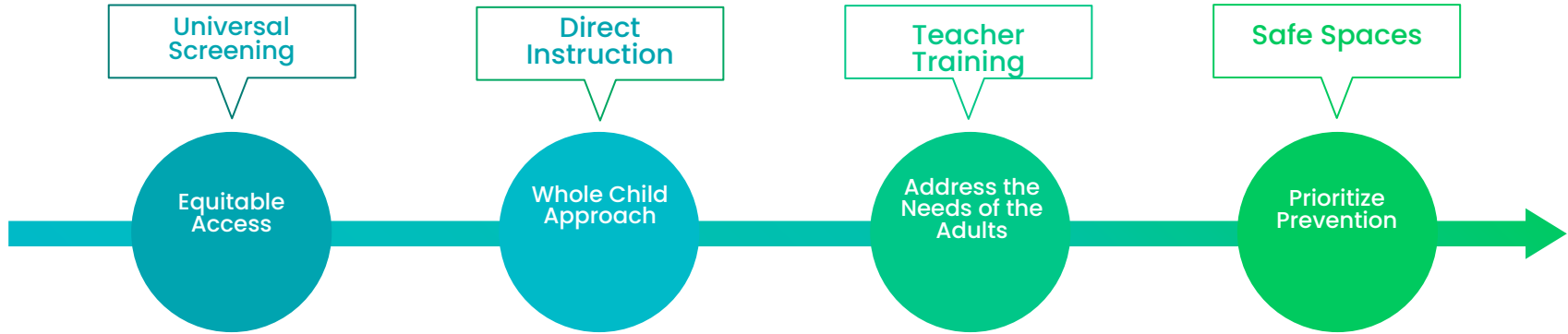
**Prevention
vs.
Punishment**

Healthy School Environment

- Encourage Positive Teacher–Student Relationships
- Build Engagement, Motivation, Sense of Belonging

Conclusion

Call to Action: Key Considerations



- ★ Evidence Based SEL Curriculum
- ★ Promote Positive Relationships
- ★ Skill Development
- ★ Address the Root Cause of Behavior
- ★ Early Intervention

Q & A

Resources

Sample Activities

Daily Activity: Recognizing Emotions

Objective: Students will identify and name their emotions, building awareness and vocabulary around their feelings.

Grade Level: Adaptable for K–12

Morning Emotional Check In (5 minutes)

Elementary

Materials: Emotions Chart with Faces (happy, sad, angry, excited, etc.)

1. As students arrive, have them place a magnet or sticky note with their name on the chart next to the emotion they're feeling.
2. Take 1-2 minutes to discuss common emotions in the class that day.
For example, "I see a lot of students feeling excited. Can anyone share why they're feeling that way?"

Sample Activities

Daily Activity: Recognizing Emotions

Objective: Students will identify and name their emotions, building awareness and vocabulary around their feelings.

Grade Level: Adaptable for K–12

Morning Emotional Check In (5 minutes)

Middle School & High School

Materials: Digital Survey or Sticky Note Board with Emotions

1. Students will fill out a Google form or sticky note with their chosen emotion and why they feel that way (optional for privacy).
2. Teachers can review patterns and use them to connect briefly.
For example, "Many of us are feeling tired today. Let's talk about strategies to boost our energy during class."

Sample Activities

Daily Activity: Emotion Vocabulary Builder

Grade Level: All Grades

Emotion Vocabulary Builder (2-3 minutes)

Materials: Word Wall with Emotions or an Online Tool (e.g., Kahoot for a quick quiz)

1. Introduce one new emotion word each day (e.g., content, frustrated, anxious, etc.)
2. Provide a quick example: "If you feel frustrated, you might be stuck on a hard problem."
3. Ask students to share moments they have felt like the example (if comfortable sharing).

Sample Activities

Daily Activity: Midday Emotion Tracker

Grade Level: Elementary

Midday Emotion Tracker (2 minutes)

Materials: Feelings Thermometer Poster

1. Using a Feelings Thermometer Poster, ask: “Are your emotions still the same as this morning, or have they changed?” Students show this with a hand signal, or by adjusting their chart.

Grade Level: Middle & High School

Midday Emotion Tracker (2 minutes)

Materials: Feelings Thermometer Poster

1. Using a Feelings Thermometer Poster, pair students to discuss:
“How are you feeling now compared to the start of the day? What caused the change?”

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