Classroom/Targeted Group Curriculum to Accompany the Terrace Metrics System

Terrace Metrics, Inc., 2020

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Introduction: Solving the WHY and the HOW

How will you know that your students can succeed as adults? What skills would you want to make sure they have to navigate through life's challenges?

In our work with school districts over the past 30 years, we often start off by asking the audience these same questions. Considering that the audience members – mostly consisting of educators* and administers – have devoted their entire professional careers to the art and practice of teaching, one might expect answers that reflect their pedagogic passion, or at the very least related to their subject area. Yet by far the most common responses have to do with ensuring that students acquire larger life skills: *to work through adversity, to be critical thinkers, to accept responsibility for their own actions, to get along with others, to see their place in the world and how to make their world a better place*. Many educators have stated that it is the opportunity to teach these life skills that drew them teaching in the first place and it is based on these skills that their ultimate success will be judged.

The conversation often then turns to more pragmatic questions: *why* is it important to target life skills, particularly in this era of high stakes accountability? Does the time to do so detract from learning? And just *how* do we do teach these skills? Such questions are not new; schools historically have struggled with defining and incorporating life skills within a standard curriculum without taking time away from teaching subject matter. A quick perusal of report cards from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s illustrates how schools took the first steps to evaluate life skills, and like most new approaches the effort outstripped implementation. Skills were often poorly defined and difficult to assess (e.g., "is courteous", "is prepared", "shares interesting experiences") and progress was determined simply by checking off a box.[1] Ongoing education reform efforts have further reinforced the notion that teaching life skills, while worthwhile, are secondary to the larger goal of meeting federal and state academic standards. It is thus not surprising that while educators embrace the value of life skills development in all students,[2-3] many school districts report that they do not have a program or curriculum that is designed to do so.[4]

However, research in education and developmental science has shown that behavioral health is a necessary precursor to learning essential life skills, which in turn leads to optimal academic outcomes.[5-7] Indeed, studies conclusively show that regardless of age, school location, and community demographics, students reporting higher (i.e., more positive) behavioral health report better academic outcomes, more favorable social connections, and more positive mental health than peers with comparatively poorer behavioral health.[8-10] Finally, students who report higher behavioral health are able to overcome current and future adversity, fully attend to their schoolwork, and practice and exhibit the skills they need to become healthy, productive, and satisfied adults.[11] Collectively, these findings offer strong evidence that for life skills development and learning to truly be effective, optimal behavioral health is paramount for student success.

Behavioral health influences not only education outcomes but physical health, quality of life, and even mortality. While every generation can be defined by technological milestones, today's "wired" generation (i.e., those born in 2000 and after) differ from preceding generations in numerous ways. These youth have access to more diverse sources of information, they have more opportunities to connect with others (through social media platforms) and they are more facile at using these technologies than most educators and parents. There are clear advantages to having almost instantaneous access to information; today's youth appear to be more willing to understand themselves, their larger world, and their place in it than previous generations. Nevertheless, this access-combined with other sociodemographic changes in America that directly affect youth[12]- may come at a cost. Today's youth report significantly higher levels of distress, loneliness, and poorer emotional health than previous generations,[13] and depression and suicide rates among teens are the highest on record,[14] If there ever was a group who could benefit from behavioral health development, today's youth would be high on the list.[15]

While there is enough evidence to answer the *why*, the *how* remains an ongoing dilemma for educators. Simply put, there are far too many behavioral health indicators that can be targeted for school- or classroom-wide assessment and intervention, leaving educators confused as to what exactly should be the focus for students. Further, many curricula that target behavioral health are not based on evidence-based practices and only provide educators with general information, rather than step-by-step exercises that are easy to implement at the classroom level. Finally, many available lesson plans require resources and time that are beyond the comfort level of many educators.

Terrace Metrics was founded on the oft-cited principle that *what gets measured gets accomplished*. This curriculum is a direct extension of that guiding principle, giving schools an empirically informed tool to improve targeted behavioral health attributes. The curriculum contains multiple evidence-based, step-by-step exercises that are easy to implement and flexible enough to use within the course of the school day. It is hoped that this curriculum provides a meaningful tool to help educators reach what many consider their ultimate standard of success.

* In this curriculum, we use the term "educators" to denote both teachers and members of a school's response team (e.g., counselors, school psychologists.

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Notes About This Curriculum

1. This curriculum is designed for Tier 1 (school-wide prevention) or Tier 2 (targeted group) delivery. The exercises contained within each curriculum module are adopted from evidence-informed practices *at the classroom level*. Thus, the curriculum should not be used as a substitute for Tier 3 (individual-focused) resources.

2.While schools can use the entire manual, each module was designed as a stand-alone component. Thus, schools can simply select and implement the modules that were identified (via the comprehensive school report) as in need of school-wide targeting.

3. Educators do not need to strictly adhere to materials within a specific lesson plan; given that the all indicators are inter-related, the educator can mix-and-match exercises that they feel best addresses their classroom's needs.

4.Each module follows a predictable structure. A brief white-board video is first presented on the module face page, which describes the targeted indicator and provides some suggestions. A very brief overview of the module follows, after which module objectives and a list of materials are presented. Virtually all materials come in the form of free, publically-posted videos that are easily accessible. These short (i.e., 3-5 minute) videos coincide with the primary lesson and are designed to stimulate group conversation.

5. Each module then provides one primary lesson, followed by multiple optional (i.e., "extended") lessons. All lessons are broken down by specific grade levels (where necessary).

6. The curriculum is intentionally designed to be as flexible as possible and to add little work to an educator's day. There is no set timeframe to implement the modules and the choice of which module lesson(s) to use is at the discretion of the educator. Further, all primary lessons are intentionally meant to be short (never lasting longer than one class period) and most of the extended lessons do not have a time frame.

7.To help educators, each section of the module is accompanied by a script. While they may read the script verbatim, this approach will likely appear too mechanical and will interfere with student buy-in. It would be better for educators to read the script beforehand (to understand the main ideas) and customize it to their own voice when presenting.

8. It is important that educators adhere to lesson plans once they are initiated. As with any skill development, meaningful improvements occur when exercises are practiced consistently over an extended time period. Although the term "occasional" is used throughout this curriculum to exercises that are continuous, we recommend that educators check in with students every two weeks once the exercises are initiated.

9. While the same module can be delivered each class period, the law of diminishing gains will quickly set in. If schools use this curriculum as a Tier I intervention, it is recommended that classrooms collaborate on who will implement the module and exercises. We recommend that the lesson plans be delivered either in the first hour (or homeroom hour) or last hour of the school day.

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How to Use the Modules

Communicating to Students its Importance to Academic and Personal Growth

This curriculum is based on a *skills development* framework, and as with any skill, acquisition depends on the amount of time and effort invested by the student. It is strongly emphasized that students complete all assignments, and educators can use various incentive systems (a point card, tokens, etc.) to maintain student motivation. For some students, working on these lessons will be quite new and therefore they may not give their full attention. We have found that educators who treat these lessons no differently than having students learn and master a new academic skill garner greater buy-in and better results.

The following script can be modified by educators according to preference; the script reinforces how seriously this curriculum is to be taken by students.

Let me emphasize how important it is that you participate in class discussions and complete assigned exercises. Some exercises can be done here at school, so it will be easier for you to complete them. However, some will ask you to do your exercises outside of school. This may be a challenge for some of you but I know that you can do this. Remember, we are doing these exercises to help you succeed not only as a student, but as a person.

There are 168 hours in a week. If you practice these new skills only briefly and continue to practice your old ways of thinking or resort to old habits, these exercises will not work. Be committed and take your growth seriously; we certainly do.

It will be important for you to take what you are learning and apply it to your everyday life. We will have important discussions throughout our time together. I expect that you will be prepared. Also, I will not do your work for you. I will guide, support, and encourage you, but you will take responsibility for your progress. Any questions?

It also may be helpful to first ask students what they are good at/most proud of. Whether it is a personal quality ("a good listener"), skill (e.g., shooting a basketball, playing the trumpet) or ability (e.g., solving math problems), most students will acknowledge that they are more advanced now than when they first began. The educator can remind the student that the path to mastering these new skills are no different. Giving the commitment they gave to their identified skill, the educator students reframe their work together as a coach-pupil relationship.

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Selecting Modules

Each module in the curriculum is designed as an independent resource, but the indicators share a moderate degree of overlap. In addition to targeting the main indicator identified in the school report, educators also may consider targeting modules that are close companions to the targeted indicator. Table 1 lists these companion modules for each targeted indicator, based on results of over 10,000 students from grades 3-12 representing urban, suburban and rural school districts. The table is separated into grades 3-5 (elementary), grades 6-8 (middle school) and grades 9-12 (high school). Companion Module 1 is the indicator that is most predictive of the targeted indicator, and Companion Module 2 is the second highest predictor. Including one or both companion modules may enhance the impact of the targeted module.

Grades 3-5

If….	**Companion Module 1**	**Companion Module 2**
Global Satisfaction	Positive Peer Experiences	Hope
Positive School Experiences	Hope	Positive Peer Experiences
Hope	Positive Peer Experiences	Global Satisfaction
Positive Peer Experiences	Global Satisfaction	Hope

Grades 6-8

If….	**Companion Module 1**	**Companion Module 2**
Global Satisfaction	Positive Peer Experiences	Hope
Positive School Experiences	Positive Peer Experiences	Global Satisfaction
Hope	Grit	Leadership
Grit	Standards	Hope
Leadership	Standards	Positive Peer Experiences
Standards	Leadership	Hope
Positive Peer Experiences	Grit	Positive School Experiences

Grades 9-12

If….	**Companion Module 1**	**Companion Module 2**
Global Satisfaction	Hope	Positive Peer Experiences
Positive School Experiences	Positive Peer Experiences	Hope
Hope	Grit	Global Satisfaction
Grit	Standards	Hope
Leadership	Positive Peer Experiences	Standards
Standards	Leadership	Grit
Positive Peer Experiences	Positive School Experiences	Global Satisfaction

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[1]Footnote

Examples across decades can be retrieved from

- http://www.duryeapa.com/1960s/PA%20Duryea%201960%2061%20Moran%20Ron%20Report%20Card%20Wilson%20School.jpg
- https://www.google.com/search?q=example+of+a+1950s+learning+curriculum&rlz=1C1OKWM_enUS777US777&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=2oPXDHJMQ3g9uM%253A%252C5mL8UZ6NyRJMrM%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_-kRkkkiKcYILA9h1I1Ja_1cQqzgntw&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiCop3orJ7jAhXTUsOKHaBVBQ0Q9QEwBHoECAYQCg#imgdii=vnDSQZQsU0ap-M:&imgrc=qi-wy_093pI2yM:&vet=1
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