

CHAPTER 2

YOU ARE A MUSICIAN. YOU ARE LOVED!

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I teach elementary school and middle school general music in Park Ridge, Illinois, a northwest suburb of Chicago. At Emerson Middle School I teach sixth grade general music, seventh grade keyboarding, and seventh grade digital music lab. These courses each meet daily for one trimester (two hundred minutes total per week). Sixth grade general music is a required exploratory course for all sixth grade students. Keyboarding and digital music lab are two of five music electives open to seventh and eighth grade students. The other three music electives are guitar, music theater workshop, and vocal power. All seventh grade students are required to take at least one music elective.

At Field Elementary School, I teach kindergarten through fifth grade. First grade has music class three times a week all year long, and each class is thirty minutes. All other grade levels have music class twice weekly all year long, and each class is thirty minutes. I also direct fifth grade chorus during lunch. I have a colleague whose full teaching load is at Field, and between us we cover twenty-nine classes for approximately 670 students.

I have been teaching for nine years, all of them in the same district, which also happens to be the district I attended as a student. I hold a Bachelor of Music Education degree from DePauw University and a Master of Musical Arts in music education from Boston University. As of fall 2020 I am working toward a Doctorate of Musical Arts in music education from Boston University. Outside of school and the co-curricular activities I direct and facilitate there, my musical life consists of teaching private brass lessons to a small studio (mostly trumpet students), playing

trumpet in a church brass ensemble, singing in a church choir, and attending as many concerts as my husband and I can afford. It is really important to me to keep my musical life rich as a listener as well as a performer and educator.

Education policy is also an important part of my life. I value the opportunity to affect the course of education both in my classroom and on a larger scale. In 2017–2018 I was a Teach Plus Illinois Teaching Policy fellow. I served as a Teach Plus Illinois Senior Fellow for the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 cohorts of the Teach Plus Illinois Teaching Policy fellowship. One of the 2018–2019 working groups I worked with focused on trauma-informed practices, and the 2019–2020 working group I worked with focused on how Social Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies and teaching capabilities are developed by teacher preparation programs and school districts. The 2018–2019 working group created a toolkit for educators who want to advocate for trauma-informed practices in their school communities. The 2019–2020 group conducted research on how teacher preparation programs prepare teacher candidates for the SEL needs of their future students and the candidates themselves, and how school districts support teachers in facilitating the SEL growth of their students. I was also a member of the Illinois ESSA Arts Indicator Working Group in 2018.

PEOPLE FIRST, MUSICIANS SECOND, AND STUDENTS THIRD

Though being split between two buildings has its challenges, I love that I get to witness the growth that takes place from kindergarten through seventh grade. I have been able to see some of the exact same students develop from early elementary school to the middle of middle school. So much growth occurs throughout all those years, and yet students' core needs and the joys that should be a part of childhood do not change much at all.

In case I ever forget, seeing that same humanity across the large age range of my students very quickly reminds me that they are all people first, musicians second, and students (in this formalized system we call school) third. They come to school to be loved, to learn, to find community, to be safe, to find their passions, and to be supported as they grow into the best version of themselves. This never changes regardless of how big and strong they grow to be, what new vocabulary they learn, or how forthright they are in telling me just how much they enjoy (or don't) coming to music class. Many wise people have already noted that Maslow must come before Bloom. It's true, and as an educator, I try to keep that in the front of my mind no

matter what colorful language a student has used or how much taller they are than me. (At five feet and a quarter inch tall, I am often much shorter than them from fifth grade on!)

MY GUIDING PRINCIPLES

I have striven to integrate Social Emotional Learning (SEL) components into the routines of my classrooms—so much so that I would guess my students have no idea they are strengthening SEL competencies in music class. To them, we are just having a normal music class. While music education opens up unique opportunities for SEL, there are also many ways in which integrated SEL implementation in the music classroom may look similar to that in the general classroom. Thus, the broad implementation of SEL in my classroom does indeed look similar to how it might look in a non-music classroom.

In the same way that students require instruction in math, reading, and music, students need instruction in SEL as well. Similarly, as students make mistakes during academic learning processes, students also make mistakes as they develop their SEL competencies. Acknowledging that academic errors are an expected part of the learning process, we do not punish students for making these errors. When students make genuine mistakes as they develop their SEL competencies, they deserve guidance to resolve their mistakes without punishment. Students need to be held accountable for the impact of their action and do the work to restore relationships that may have been damaged, but punishment does not accomplish that.

I value restorative practices. When mistakes are made, we work on restoring the relationship that has been harmed during a conflict. When students and I have conversations about poor choices, I make every effort to let the child know the behavior is unacceptable, but I am still glad they are in class and I still love them. I work to give grace where I know it is needed, and in situations where I am unsure but have suspicions, I am often asking, “Is there something you would like to talk about?” I no longer focus on consequences for their own sake, but for how they help students find resolution and bring peace back to our classroom community.

I value and do my best to utilize trauma-informed practices in my room as well. My students are fortunate to live in an area where there is not community trauma, but individual trauma exists everywhere and they are not insulated from it. We have clear expectations that are applied universally. Knowing the value of safe and trustworthy adults in a child’s life and the value of positive relationships

in general, I make a point to connect with every student every day, even if it is just addressing them by name as they walk into the classroom. And while expectations are clear and universal, I am not afraid to be flexible. If they forget something, my middle schoolers can go to their locker without being shamed. My elementary school student who definitely does not need three drinks of water in thirty minutes, but whose body language is showing me they need the chance to get up and move or leave the classroom for a tiny break, can absolutely go get every drink they ask for. All students benefit from a little grace, but for students who have experienced trauma, who may be internally juggling a lot more than we will ever know, the opportunity to get that book from their locker without shame or get some extra energy out can be especially supportive.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has a framework of five competencies that I increasingly use to guide my work. These five competencies are: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. If I am creating a lesson that explicitly addresses SEL, I check which CASEL competencies it aligns with. As I refine lessons, I am working to ensure that throughout the course of my students' elementary school music careers we are covering all of the CASEL competencies through our experiences in making, moving to, creating, and connecting to music. In the relatively brief time I see my middle school students (just a single trimester!), I try to cover as many as I can.

APPLICATION OF MY GUIDING PRINCIPLES: SPECIFIC STRATEGIES I USE

MODELING

CASEL Competency: Self-Management

Illinois SEL Standard

- Goal 1A: Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.

In *Mindfulness for Teachers*, Patricia A. Jennings suggests that teachers express their emotions in ways that model healthy expressions of feelings. Though this was initially uncomfortable for me, it has created a shift in my classroom. When students are making poor choices, particularly when a class as a whole is having a difficult

day, it has given me space to be honest with my students and calmly tell them I am frustrated. Depending on the age of the students, I may ask if they know why I am frustrated (which gives them a chance to reflect on the way their actions impact someone else), or I may simply tell students why their actions are frustrating to me. I make a point to clearly separate my feelings about my students' behavior from my feelings about them as people. They always leave class knowing I still love them even if I do not love the choices they made that day. Students get to see a model of how to healthily handle uncomfortable emotions (without yelling or hurting other people's feelings) and how to communicate those feelings to another person. When my students have uncomfortable emotions, I make a point to tell them that it is okay to feel whatever they are feeling, but it is not okay to hurt other people as they deal with those feelings or try to express those feelings to others. My previous modeling hopefully provides a concrete example of how feelings can be expressed without losing control of ourselves or harming our relationships in the process.

FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVE AND NOTEWORTHY MUSIC STUDENT

CASEL Competency: Responsible Decision-Making

Illinois SEL Standards

- Goal 3B: Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.
- Goal 3C: Contribute to the well-being of one's school and community.

I never wanted to be the teacher who used external motivators (i.e., stereotypical treasure chests) to motivate my students to make responsible choices that allowed for their best learning and music making. Yet I quickly learned that while intrinsic motivation can and should be nurtured in the classroom, purely intrinsic motivation cannot be wholly relied upon in a classroom setting. In one of my first years of teaching, the whole staff at Field School read *The Inner Wealth Initiative: The Nurtured Heart Approach for Educators*. While I drew many techniques from the book and it helped me alter significant habits of mind, the technique that most radically altered the way I approach behavior was focusing on students' positive behaviors. It was not just telling kids when they were doing something well (even my very early career self was wholly capable of that). Instead of scolding Daniel for once again kicking the risers as loudly as possible, it was verbally praising

Erica and Alex for sitting with quiet feet so they and the friends sitting around them could hear the music we were listening to. To say I was initially skeptical is a complete understatement. I remember being sure that I would prove, through trying it, that this way of approaching student behavioral choices would in fact make behavior worse.

I was very wrong. Instead of my students continuing to make poor choices in order to have their need for attention met, they chose to make better choices and receive praise from myself and classmates for being such positive contributors to our classroom. The kids who had been striving to be positive contributors all along were still receiving well-earned praise. I wanted to capitalize on this (after swallowing my own ego and admitting that I had been terribly wrong), so I started down a path to create something that gave recognition to students who were having a positive impact on our classroom while also making sure we honored what each student added to the classroom community each day.

To this end, I implemented Noteworthy Music Student. At the end of class each day, I choose one student (sometimes two) who is the Noteworthy Music Student for the class for that day. I choose based on who demonstrated the criteria on the Noteworthy Music Student card and, when at all possible, from a list of students who have not yet been Noteworthy Music Student. The chosen student gets a Noteworthy Music Student card with their name written on the back and the positive actions I saw them demonstrate in class that day checked off. The Noteworthy Music Student card includes both specifically musical accomplishments and also actions demonstrating SEL competencies. After I announce who the Noteworthy Music Student is, the class claps for them. That is it. They love it. They love a black-and-white printed half-sheet of paper with their name and some check marks on it and ten seconds of applause from their classmates. They love it because what it really means is that others see their efforts to make positive choices and value what they and their positive choices add to our classroom.

Helpful Hints for Implementing Noteworthy Music Student:

- At the beginning of the year, my students and I have a conversation about how much we want to celebrate everyone in our classroom for the hard work they do and the way they contribute to our classroom. To make sure we celebrate everyone, we try to make sure we celebrate a positive day for everyone once before we start having second celebrations for students.

- Especially important in younger grades, we talk about how celebrating one person's good day does not mean everyone else had a bad day or other people didn't do good work that day.
- There are days when the students waiting for their first turn to be recognized as Noteworthy Music Student do not have the kind of day that is noteworthy in a positive sense. When this happens, I calmly tell the class we are going to have a repeat Noteworthy Music Student even though some students are waiting for their first turn. If they ask why, I tell them this is happening because the students waiting for their first turns unfortunately did not make decisions that earned them that title for the day. I make sure I absolutely do *not* let students have any idea who I am not choosing due to their less-than-ideal choices that day. Shame is not the goal. The goal is recognizing positive choices.

Noteworthy Music Student 	Earned by _____ for _____ ☐ Being creative ☐ Mastering musical concepts ☐ Counting or playing rhythms correctly ☐ Using good singing posture and breathing ☐ Demonstrating responsible instrument playing ☐ Demonstrating good leadership ☐ Cooperating with classmates ☐ Making insightful connections ☐ Persevering to learn a new skill or concept ☐ Showing resilience when learning did not go as planned ☐ Respecting self, learning, and others ☐ Making safe choices during a movement activity
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Front

Back

CIRCLES

CASEL Competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills

Illinois SEL Standards

- Goal 1A: Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.
- Goal 2B: Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.
- Goal 2C: Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.

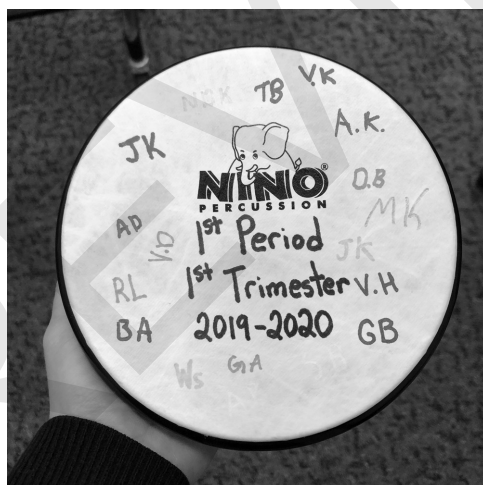
In the 2019–2020 academic year, I began using circles as a form of community-building with each of my second through fifth grade classes at the elementary school and some of my middle school classes. Our talking piece in each class is a small, relatively inexpensive hand drum that each student writes their initials on at the beginning of the year. The goal is to make the talking piece musical and personal to each class, but also inexpensive enough that I can hopefully afford to personally purchase one per class per academic year. The plan is to do a raffle at the end of the year for someone to take home their class' talking piece.

Once every week or two, students and I sit in a circle and share with each other. Sometimes we share something related to music such as, “Who is your favorite musical artist?” or something related specifically to what we are doing in music class such as, “What was the most difficult part of learning that chord progression with your group?” Other times we share something more general about ourselves such as, “Cats or dogs?” or “What is one fear you have?”

Active music making is important, but so is community building. It seems we often forget that our general music classrooms are essentially flexible ensembles that shift between being a large vocal ensemble, a large instrumental ensemble, chamber vocal ensembles, and chamber instrumental ensembles (not even counting the days they become dance troupes or composer collectives performing each other's works). We know ensembles perform better when there is a sense of community that comes not only from making music with other musicians, but from getting to know each other personally as well. I believe we take for granted how well some students know the other students in their own homeroom classes, and our music making experiences only improve when we take the time to get to know each other better in music class.

I am getting to know my students better one answer at a time. They are getting to know each other better as well. We are also working on respecting each other by listening silently as others share and speaking only when we each have the talking piece, myself as the teacher included. For some students this is also a difficult but important exercise in strengthening their self-control. For all students it is strengthening their overall ability to listen. Any musician knows the abilities to listen carefully and maintain focus on what we are hearing are absolutely core to being a strong musician.

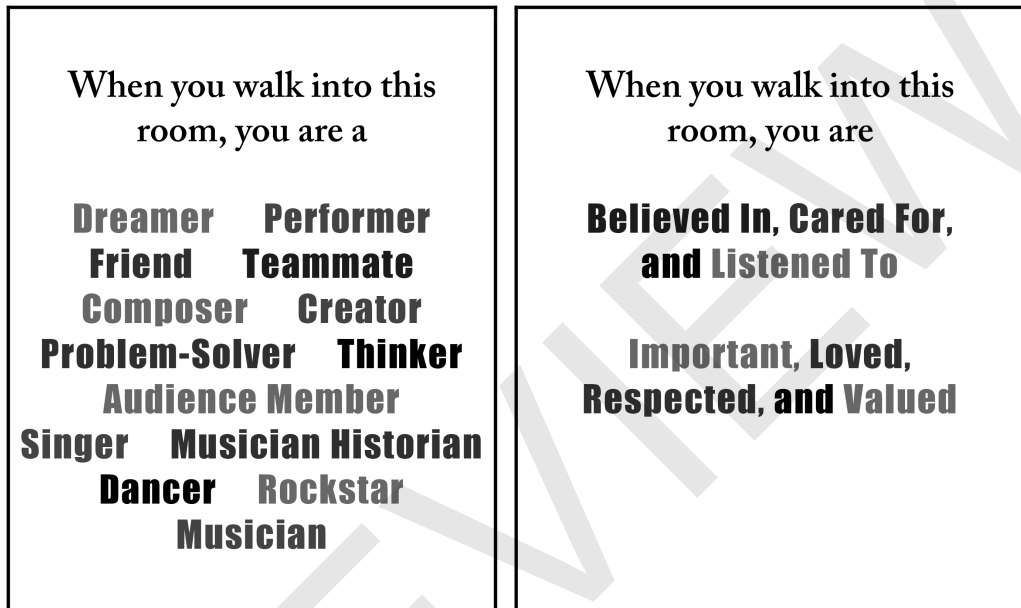
Additionally, this community building circle can transition to a restorative circle should we need to address a concern that has arisen in our classroom or school community. Because we will have established strong relationships and clear expectations for sharing and listening in the circle, we will have a solid foundation for restoring relationships and rebuilding the community if damage has been done.



"WHEN YOU WALK INTO THIS ROOM..." DOOR POSTERS

I have seen a lot of posters that list all the roles students fill throughout their day (scientist, mathematician, author, etc.), but I could not find one that listed all the musical roles they fill in music class that I felt fit my classroom. To communicate to my students all the roles I saw them filling and how I felt about them as their teacher, I created two different posters that hang on my door. I am not under the illusion that this is the most impactful way that SEL takes place in my classroom, but I think it is one of the things that sets the tone for the musical learning experience I want my

students to have. I want them to know that they are valued and loved and that in the same way they are mathematicians in their homeroom, they are also composers and audience members and dancers in the music classroom.



GREETING ALL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS AT OUR CLASSROOM DOOR

CASEL Competency: Relationship Skills

Illinois SEL Standard

- Goal 2C: Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.

I greet each one of my elementary school students at my classroom door at the beginning of their class period. I use a poster I purchased on Teachers Pay Teachers, and students point to which greeting they would like us to use. While I don't know if my students would verbalize that this is a meaningful part of our class time together, their actions indicate that this routine is indeed very meaningful to them. I assumed my older students might not be enthused, but very few of my fifth grade students need a reminder to stop so we can greet each other; most of them greet me enthusiastically.

Students at all grade levels have found ways to take the five options and make them their own. There are students who request a double pinky hug that uses both hands, students who simultaneously request a different greeting with each hand, and the third grade boy who created a two-greeting combination handshake for him and me that we now use at the beginning of each class period. I have a second grade student who chooses the “hello” option and greets me with “dzień dobry,” sharing his Polish culture with me each day. Some kindergarten students have created their own ways to greet me, including tapping elbows and making a heart shape with their hands (with the expected response being that I make one in return). The smiles on their faces and the customization speak to a meaningful connection and a desire for a unique connection.

Time is a scarce resource for most teachers. When I first came upon it, I loved the idea of greeting each student at the door at the beginning of each class. It felt so meaningful to make sure each student knew they were seen each music class by us making eye contact, me greeting them by name, and them choosing their preferred greeting. Yet I was concerned about how long greeting every single student at the door would take. I teach between approximately 90 and 140 elementary school students a day. That collective number seemed daunting in this context, but I decided I was going to take the leap. In reality, every single student needs to walk through my door to start class. A pause to greet each other adds only a couple of seconds to a student’s entry. Overall, I have gained time for learning and music making by continuing to build relationships with each student and strengthen our community in the music classroom.

Helpful Hints for Implementation:

1. I did not introduce greetings on the first day of class, but I did introduce it within the first few classes for each homeroom. Ongoing routines from previous years needed to be reviewed before it would have been wise to add something new; however, I wanted to introduce greetings early enough in the year that it felt like a normal part of class that we had “always” been doing. I waited a few weeks to introduce this to kindergarten because, honestly, half of them are in such a state of adorable bewilderment during the first weeks of school that they don’t even remember their own names.

2. When I introduced this routine:
 - a. I projected a PDF of the poster on the SmartBoard. I wanted all students to be able to clearly see the options at the same time.
 - b. I asked students to practice each greeting with a classmate. I asked them to wave and say “hello” to someone sitting near them, to give someone sitting next to them a high five, to turn to a different person sitting next to them and fist bump that classmate, to look at someone across the room and give them a thumbs up, and to give someone sitting close to them a pinky hug.
 - c. The day I introduced our greeting routine, the students and I practiced first. I sent small groups to the hallway and then had students choose a greeting on their way back into the classroom.
3. Stay healthy! I love my students. I love them so much. I really do not love their germs. They lick their hands, cough into their hands, and come into class with unknown substances on their hands. I greet them all at the door, and most of them choose some kind of greeting that involves our hands touching. I use hand sanitizer in every class after greeting students at the door. I use it quickly while I give directions for our first activity. It does not faze the kids, and even my boldest students have not bothered to ask about it. Unless you have a compromised immune system, please do not let the million gross things children touch keep you from greeting your students by name with the greeting of their choice at the door.

Resource: <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Editable-Morning-Greeting-Signs-to-Build-Classroom-Community-1918756>

STUDENT-CREATED GROUP NORMS

CASEL Competency: Relationship Skills

Illinois SEL Standards

- Goal 3A: Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.
- Goal 3B: Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.

Students in my elementary school classes do a lot of group work. When working on a long-term group project, such as a composition project that culminates in a performance, intermediate grade students create group norms for their members to abide by. Each group writes a rough draft of norms that encompasses how they will need to work together to complete the musical task at hand. After I type up the norms, students read them one more time to double check that they agree on them, and then they sign at the bottom. These norms are referenced when students have difficulty working together in the group or when the group is not completing its work. The norms are meant both as a quick reference for problem-solving ideas and as a reminder that they agreed on the ways in which they would work together. Because students created these norms for a project in music class, they very often include music-class-specific norms, such as how they will decide on which instruments to use, how they will share instruments, and what to do if they disagree on what rhythms to use in their composition.

Group Guidelines

1. Show Field CARES.
2. Be respectful.
3. Don't talk when other people are talking.
4. Treat instruments respectfully.
5. Be responsible.
6. Let everyone give ideas.
7. Work together.
8. Be kind to people in other groups.
9. Rock, paper, scissors on a disagreement.

MIDDLE SCHOOL DAILY CHECK-IN

CASEL Competency: Self-Awareness

Illinois SEL Standard

- Goal 1A: Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.

My middle school students complete a daily check-in that shares with me how they are doing when they walk into my classroom. Inspired by a principal in our district, this check-in comes in the shape of an online form I created. Below are the questions students answer:

1. Date
2. Name (chosen from a dropdown menu)
3. How are you doing today? (checkboxes)
 - I am doing great and I am 100% ready to learn and participate in class today!
 - I am feeling happy about something at home or outside of the school day.
 - I am feeling happy about something at school.
 - I am feeling excited about something at home or outside of the school day.
 - I am feeling excited about something at school.
 - I am doing okay, but I am extra tired today.
 - I am doing okay, but I am having difficulty focusing.
 - I am feeling angry about something at home or outside of the school day.
 - I am feeling angry about something at school.
 - I am feeling sad about something at home or outside of the school day.
 - I am feeling sad about something at school.
 - I am feeling worried about something at home or outside of the school day.
 - I am feeling worried about something at school.
 - Other _____
4. Do you feel like you need to or want to talk to Ms. Kwasny about how you're feeling?
 - Yes.
 - No.
 - I'm not sure. I will ask during class if I decide I need to or want to talk to Ms. Kwasny.
5. Do you feel like you need to or want to talk to another adult besides Ms. Kwasny about how you're feeling?
 - Yes.
 - No.
 - I will let you know later.

I post the online form as an ungraded assignment in our online learning management system each day, and students fill it out using their laptops when they walk into the classroom. I read their answers while they do a warm-up activity. My keyboarding classes have a maximum of eighteen students due to space constraints. I can click through and scan their answers in about three minutes even with students popping up to my desk to ask me questions.

My first priority when scanning answers is making sure that there is no one who feels like they need to talk to me or another adult. My second priority is taking stock of which students chose an answer other than “I am doing great and I am 100% ready to learn and participate in class today!” Those students may have a really successful day in music class; however, if they end up struggling, I already have an idea of what may be making it more difficult for them to be successful. I also have a starting point for supporting them should they need extra support that day.

While I am not in a position to be a counselor, sometimes students just have a bad day and want to tell someone about it. I can definitely be that person for them. Other times, after listening to a student share something about their life, I may tell them I am grateful they felt comfortable sharing with me, but I am going to connect them with a social worker or counselor so they can continue working through the tough situation they were telling me about.

A Note About Technology

I understand that for a variety of reasons using technology is not an option in every school setting. I teach in a district that has 1:1 devices, which allows me to utilize this option. If you are in a teaching situation where you can use technology for a check-in, I would encourage you to consider it for two reasons. The first is that it allows for complete student privacy. Some other systems for collecting similar information are posted on the classroom wall, which does not allow a student complete privacy from potentially snooping classmates. Second, using a digital format for collecting student answers means I can easily open up the associated spreadsheet and have data from an entire trimester in one clearly organized format. I have student-reported data on how that student has been feeling for weeks, if not months, should I need to advocate for that student to receive additional support from counseling staff.

Helpful Hints for Your Daily Check-In

1. *Make the “Your Name” question a drop-down menu.* After getting students’ preferred names on the first day of class, create the form with each student’s preferred name as a drop-down option. Start check-ins on the second day of class. If you need to sort data quickly later, you can ensure you are getting all the answers that came from a single student when you sort by name.
2. *Make the answers to the question about how a student is feeling checkboxes.* This allows students to choose to describe their emotional state in one or more ways. I initially used checkboxes instead of a single answer option because I assumed that students could be feeling several uncomfortable emotions at once, such as feeling anxious and sad. Though students have chosen two uncomfortable feelings, more often than not, if a student chooses more than one emotional state, they choose options that I did not initially consider coexisting. These include combinations such as being ready to learn and being extra tired. It is important that all students be able to accurately relate the way they are feeling, and checkboxes are the best way to accommodate a dizzying number of potential combinations.
3. *Provide an “Other” checkbox with a write-in option.* I had one student check this box and write in “good” every single day for the whole trimester. He felt like this was the most accurate description of how he was feeling and it is great he could share that with me. I have also had students choose an option from the list above and then use the “other” write-in option as space to provide details about how they are feeling or the situation that was spurring their emotional reaction. Students have shared a variety of things with me this way—from one student’s worry for their older dog’s health, to another’s stress over having a particularly difficult day with their asthma on the same day as basketball try-outs. I almost definitely would not have known this information if students did not have a write-in option. This space has particularly mattered to a few students who would verbally ask, “Did you read what I wrote in the ‘Other’ section?” I would say yes and ask if they wanted to chat about it. The answer was always “no,” but there was a clear desire to make sure that I was aware of what they shared.

CHECK-INS FOR UNDERSTANDING AND SEL

CASEL Competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision-Making

Illinois SEL Standards

- Goal 1A: Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.
- Goal 1C: Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals.
- Goal 2C: Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.
- Goal 2D: Demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.
- Goal 3B: Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.

At the end of a class or activity, I will often use either a thumbs up/to the side/down or fist-to-five rating system to have students self-reflect on their learning. I ask students to close their eyes when we do this so that it is truly a personal reflection. If I notice a student is not closing their eyes, I assume that makes them uncomfortable and either motion for them to look down, or if I am standing near enough to them I whisper and ask them to look down so they are not looking at others.

After checking in on how well students feel they have mastered the musical content, I ask SEL-focused questions. I want to help students understand how their musical growth and their SEL competency development are interwoven. Questions include:

- How well did your group cooperate today?
- How well did you personally work to cooperate with your group today?
- Are you proud of the effort you put into your work today?
- Did you use self-control today when we played instruments?
- Did your actions today help you do your best work?
- Did your actions today help your group members do their best work?

I also ask students to reflect more broadly on their work. I will say things like:

- Think about your work today. When you can think of two things you are proud of, show me a thumbs up.

- Think about your work today. When you can think of one thing you wish you had done differently, show me a thumbs up. It does not have to be a terrible decision, just something you wish you had not done the way you did it.
 - After giving students time to show me a thumbs up, I will follow up with something like, “Show me a second thumbs up when you can think of a way you will make a better choice or a different choice in our next class together.”

TEACHER SELF-CARE

CASEL Competencies for the Educator: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Responsible Decision-Making

Illinois SEL Standards

- Goal 1A: Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior.
- Goal 1B: Recognize personal qualities and external supports.
- Goal 3B: Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.

I am admittedly terrible at this. I am also working hard to improve. Like so many teachers, putting myself first, even to take care of my most basic needs like sleeping enough at night and eating during lunch at school, does not come naturally to me. Also like many teachers, I bought into the narrative that this type of self-sacrifice was just part of being a good teacher. I did not skimp on sleep or skip lunch so I could be a good teacher, but it was very easy to *justify* these actions by shrugging them off and saying they were just part of what dedicated teachers do.

In reality, it was unhealthy for me to neglect caring for myself—physically, mentally, and emotionally—under the guise of being a “good” teacher. I was attempting to pour from an empty cup since I was not eating enough, sleeping enough, spending enough time with my family, taking any time for myself, or exercising at all. This neglect caused immense physical fatigue, mental strain, emotional distress, and took a toll on my relationships.

I know six hours of sleep is the threshold for me to be optimally functional during the following day. More sleep is great, but less than six hours and I know I am going to be functioning at a level below what I deserve from myself and also what my students deserve from me. I schedule my workouts at the beginning of

each week and put them on the calendar. Running helps me to relieve stress, and it is empowering to do something solely for me and my body. I schedule time with my husband and put those times on the calendar at the beginning of the week as well. If it is a busy night for both of us with teaching private lessons and we only have a twenty-minute block of time to eat ice cream and talk about our days, it still makes a difference in the strength of our relationship. I also make sure my dog, Lorraine, gets cuddles and some undivided attention when I get home from work. She is very skilled at keeping me accountable in this realm. As a family, we have started dedicating time each weekend to get out in nature and soak in all the natural beauty we can. This all matters greatly to my physical, mental, and emotional health.

No matter how much time and effort I have put into developing my own SEL competencies, I will never demonstrate my highest levels of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, or responsible decision-making if I do not take care of myself as a human being. My mental acuity is dulled when I don't feed my own body, mind, and heart, no matter how hard I try to overcome the deficiency. Even though my students do not see my personal life and the ways I am trying to take care of myself, my self-care is an integral part of our music classroom and the SEL taking place in the room.

MUSIC AND SEL ACTIVITIES

QUESTION OF THE DAY

CASEL Competencies: Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills

Illinois SEL Standards

- Goal 1A: Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.
- Goal 1B: Recognize personal qualities and external supports.
- Goal 3C: Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.

National Core Arts Standards

- Anchor 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- Anchor 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experience to make art.

My kindergarten and first grade students often complete a “Question of the Day.” I ask students the question, give them thirty seconds of think time, thirty seconds to whisper their answer to someone sitting close to them, and then we share out with the whole class. I sing the question to each student, addressing them by name, and each student sings their answer back to me. Students practice their listening skills while their classmates share and their singing skills while they share. It is a fast way for me to check on the development of their young singing voices. Sometimes questions are just about preferences, such as “What is your favorite type of ice cream?” Sometimes they are silly, such as “If you had to turn into a combination of two animals, what two-animal combo would you be?”

Other times the questions have a more direct connection to SEL. On the first day of school, I love to ask the question, “How did you feel before school this morning?” Depending on the response I get from a student, I may also follow-up with a simple, “Why?” sung back to them, giving them a chance to share more about why they were feeling that way. Another great time to do a question more directly related to SEL is when a performance is coming up. Before we start practicing for the annual whole-school performance, I ask students how they feel about that performance. Their answers can prove to be really helpful in better understanding why I see some of the behavior (prosocial and less prosocial alike) I do as we prepare for that performance and can help me better support students.

EMOJI BOARD FOR MUSIC LISTENING

CASEL Competency: Self-Awareness

Illinois SEL Standards

- Goal 1A: Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior.
- Goal 2A: Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.
- Goal 2B: Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.

National Core Arts Standards

- Anchor 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Anchor 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

As part of an assignment for the VanderCook MECA course Music Education and Social Emotional Learning (SEL): The Heart of Teaching Music, I created an emoji board for my students to use when listening to music. When I implemented it in my classroom, it quickly became one of my first and second graders' favorite activities. They begged me to repeat it, and I was happy to oblige (though not every single day, which is what they requested).

I partner students and give them one emoji board to share. There are nine emojis they can choose from when considering how the music makes them feel. There are also three empty boxes on the bottom where they can draw in an emoji if the way the music makes them feel is not represented in the other nine. I play a piece of music for thirty seconds to a minute, during which students cannot talk but can start thinking about how the music is making them feel and can point to that emoji or those emojis. Students know that it is completely fine if they choose a different emoji(s) from their partner and it is also okay if they agree about which emoji(s) represents how they feel. Once the music stops, students share with each other how they were feeling and what in the music made them feel that way. I try to do at least as many musical snippets as there are sets of partners so I can stop by each one to hear their conversation. I mostly observe student conversations because the goal is for students to build their own self-awareness. If a student is struggling to find the right words, I may throw out some ideas based on what they have already shared. I may ask questions if I think a student could go deeper into their explanation. I may also compliment particularly creative thinking or taking the risk of sharing deep emotions with their partner.

Kwasny

This music makes me feel...

 Scared	 Happy	 Calm
 Confused	 Silly	 Surprised
 Sad	 Angry	 Nervous

PICTURE BOOKS

CASEL Competencies: Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision-Making

Illinois SEL Standards

- Goal 1A: Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.
- Goal 2A: Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.
- Goal 2C: Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.
- Goal 3A: Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.

National Core Arts Standards

- Anchor 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Anchor 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

- Anchor 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.
- Anchor 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experience to make art.
- Anchor 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Picture books play a large part in all my elementary school classes. In kindergarten, first grade, and second grade, we mostly read picture books that are illustrated versions of songs, chants, or nursery rhymes. As we read or sing the books, we talk about the characters and how they are feeling or might be feeling. We use clues from the plot as well as the pictures in the book to help us understand. This does not take away from the musical skills we are learning. It simply helps students have a better understanding of the emotions that are present in the story and the accompanying song or chant. This in turn helps students better relate to the story or characters within the song or chant and in many cases perform it more musically.

As an example, when kindergarten learns the nursery rhyme “Jack and Jill,” I use *Jack and Jill: A Halloween Nursery Rhyme* by Salina Yoon to enrich our learning. When Jack falls down and breaks his crown, this book explicitly states that he is hurt and he is wearing a frown. My students and I talk about how someone feels when they wear a frown. We also talk about why Jack might be so sad. At the end of this book, Jill helps Jack fix his broken head (the magic of make believe!) and proves she is the ultimate best friend by turning the stitches into part of his Halloween costume. Jack smiles at the end of the book. We talk about how people feel when they smile, how it feels to help other people, and how Jack felt after Jill helped him.

In second and third grade I make a shift from focusing on self-awareness and social awareness with regards to understanding others’ emotions to relationship skills and responsible decision-making. I take full advantage of many wonderful picture books based on songs with powerful messages that will hopefully empower my students to be positive forces of change in the world. Reading and discussing these books still has the benefit of helping students more musically perform songs and forge more meaningful connections to the music. In addition, they help my students grow and develop as humans. *We’ve Got the Whole World in Our Hands*, a beautiful variation on the African American spiritual “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands,” sends the message that students have the power to make change in the world. Very direct connections can be made to responsible decision-making.

The More We Get Together sends a similar message about the potential of each person to change the world, but with an additional message of the greater power and impact we have when we come together to make positive changes. While responsible decision-making could be connected here, this may be an even better opportunity to connect to social awareness and relationship skills. Most recently I learned of the book *Salam Alaikum*, based on the song of the same title by artist Harris J. With a message of peace in the title, illustrations of kind actions throughout a community, and an insanely catchy song, this book has become a quick favorite of mine. Again, social awareness and relationship skills can easily be connected.

My older elementary students' music class experience also includes picture books, but instead of lyrics and illustrations being the catalyst for SEL growth, the historical context of these books and the growth of real musicians provide the SEL material for my students. When we read *We Shall Overcome*, students gain a deeper understanding of the power of music, but more importantly also of the strength of those who fought for racial and social justice during the civil rights movements and in the present. SEL competencies that can be highlighted through the history of "We Shall Overcome" include social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The *Dolly Parton* book from the "Little People, Big Dreams" series provides my students with insights into Dolly Parton's development as a musician and as a businesswoman and philanthropist. This in turn opens up the opportunity to talk about being your own person and using your resources to better your community. Possible connections to self-management and responsible decision-making are plentiful.

REFLECTIONS

CASEL Competency: Responsible Decision-Making

Illinois SEL Standards

- Goal 1A: Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.
- Goal 1C: Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals.
- Goal 3B: Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.

National Core Arts Standards

- Anchor 4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.
- Anchor 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

My middle school students complete reflections regularly. In keyboarding class, students complete them after each of the three times they perform a song from the book for the class, after the performance of their pop song final, and at the end of the course. Depending on how the trimester is progressing, students may also complete them halfway through the trimester. In sixth grade general music, students complete reflections after long-term projects. In Digital Music Lab, students complete them after each major project. In elementary school, second through fifth grade students complete them after their annual winter vocal performance. All the reflections are simple but help students think about the choices they made leading up to the performances. The older students are asked to reflect on what they could have done differently as well. Students are asked to reflect on their own actions but specifically within the realm of learning music and preparing for a performance. Below is an example of a keyboarding performance reflection.

1. Date
2. Name
3. How do you feel overall about your performance?
 - I am happy with all of it.
 - I am happy with parts of it.
 - I am not happy with most or all of it.
4. What part(s) of your performance are you most proud of?
5. What did you do before the performance today to help you play that part(s) well?
6. What part(s) of your performance do you wish had gone better?
7. What could you have done ahead of time to improve the part(s) of your performance you wish had gone better?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share about your performance?

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CHORUS CONCERT THEMES

CASEL Competencies: Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision-Making

Illinois SEL Standards

- Goal 1A: Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.
- Goal 1B: Recognize personal qualities and external supports.
- Goal 2C: Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.
- Goal 3C: Contribute to the well-being of one's school and community.

National Core Arts Standards

- Anchor 4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.
- Anchor 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
- Anchor 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

I direct fifth grade chorus and a colleague directs fourth grade chorus. In April each year, the fourth and fifth grade choruses perform two in-school performances for students and one evening performance for their family and friends. For a variety of reasons, we have always made a very conscious decision to program music outside the children's chorus canon. In recent years we have started programming around SEL themes. A sampling of these themes, the songs we programmed, and the artists best known for performing these songs or the musical or movie the song is from is found below. Many songs with positive messages could easily fall under multiple themes.

Perseverance	Positivity	Community
Fourth Grade • You Raise Me Up (Josh Groban) • Try Everything (Shakira) • Defying Gravity (Wicked) Fifth Grade • Three Little Birds (Bob Marley) • Lean on Me (Bill Withers) • Stand By Me (Ben E. King) Fourth & Fifth Grade • Bridge Over Troubled Water (Simon & Garfunkel) • Can't Stop the Feeling (Trolls) • Life Is a Highway (Cars)	Fourth Grade • Best Day of My Life (American Authors) • Pure Imagination (Charlie and the Chocolate Factory) • A Million Dreams (The Greatest Showman) Fifth Grade • Unwritten (Natasha Bedingfield) • Rise Up (Andra Day) • Here Comes the Sun (The Beatles) Fourth & Fifth Grade • What a Wonderful World (Louis Armstrong) • Don't Worry, Be Happy (Bobby McFerrin)	Fourth Grade • Consider Yourself (Oliver) • One Call Away (Charlie Puth) • Shooting Star (Owl City) Fifth Grade • Ain't No Mountain High Enough (Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell) • Count on Me (Bruno Mars) • Home (Phillip Phillips) Fourth & Fifth Grade • Have It All (Jason Mraz) • We Are Family (Sister Sledge)

We are all too aware that music alone cannot change the difficulties some of our students face. But filling students' minds and souls with music that sends them impactful and empowering messages about their own strength to persevere, their ability to maintain a positive attitude, and the opportunity to find support in friends can be a comfort to them and a reminder that they can overcome the difficulties they face.

These themes also provide the opportunity for students to reflect and think deeply about the meaning of the words they are singing. When students sang "Bridge Over Troubled Water," we asked them to briefly write about a time they were a "bridge" to someone (human or animal). We took pictures of them holding their signs and created a slideshow presentation with these pictures. When students sang "What a Wonderful World," they filled out a quick one-question reflection about what in this world was wonderful to them. There was value in students taking the time to reflect on what they enjoy in life, even without a presentation being created with this information.

EMBRACING EMOTIONS WITH KLEENEX FOR CHORUS MEMBERS

CASEL Competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness

Illinois SEL Standards

- Goal 1A: Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.
- Goal 1B: Recognize personal qualities and external supports.
- Goal 1C: Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals.
- Goal 2A: Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.
- Goal 2B: Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.
- Goal 2C: Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.

National Core Arts Standards

- Anchor 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
- Anchor 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- Anchor 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experience to make art.

In the 2018–2019 academic year, I had a significantly smaller than average number of fifth grade chorus members. However, they were amazing students, and what they lacked in numbers they more than made up for in personality and musicality. That year they sang “Rise Up” by Andra Day. My kids cried. The better they got at performing the song and the closer they grew as friends and ensemble members, the more they cried. Then I cried. I cried because I knew the struggles of some of them, and I cried because there was beauty in how comfortable they were with each other. I cried because I was conducting them and watching them slowly break down into tears at every rehearsal. When talking with students about emotions, I choose to avoid labeling emotions as negative. I work to frame emotions as comfortable or uncomfortable because I think this is the healthiest way to frame emotional experiences. I had to hold tight to this belief, as I needed my very small chorus to be able to sing “Rise Up” in its entirety—a questionable task given the crying. I decided that we needed to embrace the crying. The tears were a testament to the power of music, to their comfort with each other, and to their trust in me. I went out and purchased many packs of Kleenex—the ones with the inspirational sayings, of course. On each Kleenex I wrote a message to a student. I wrote a message

that I thought they needed to hear to have the best performance possible without suppressing their feelings that came from singing “Rise Up.” After the in-school performances, I gave each student their Kleenex. It was small enough to fit in a pocket if they wanted to bring it to the evening concert. If not, they each received a message of their importance and the message that it was okay to have intense feelings, even in the middle of a concert you are performing.

The performances for students during the school day are not long enough for all of the songs to be sung at each performance. Students vote on what they want to sing at each performance, knowing different grade levels will be in attendance at the two performances. They had voted to sing “Rise Up” at the performance their grade level peers would be attending. They had voted on this a few weeks earlier before the crying had peaked. Believing I was doing them a favor, I made the executive decision to remove “Rise Up” from that performance. I told them and thought they would be relieved. Instead, they lovingly but firmly revolted. They were so confident in themselves and found such deep meaning in that song that they were ready to fight me to perform it in front of their peers, which in this case also meant to cry in front of their peers. They sounded fantastic, but that was only a sliver of why I was proud of them. That group of students will forever hold a special place in my heart.



JUKEBOX

CASEL Competencies: Self-Awareness, Social Awareness

Illinois SEL Standard

- Goal 1A: Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.
- Goal 2A: Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.
- Goal 2B: Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.

National Core Arts Standards

- Anchor 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Anchor 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

In January 2020, I attended the second annual Remixing General Music conference. At the end of the 2020 conference, teachers in attendance were lucky enough to work with Mother Nature, artist-educators who provide youth-centered programming through their workshop series “The Miseducation of Hip Hop.” They are encouraging, inspiring, and impressive. Jukebox, an activity they did with attendees, is a perfect SEL activity for intermediate elementary school students through high school students. With their permission, it is being shared here.

The members of Mother Nature create a playlist based on music that students are currently listening to and enjoy. (This is a simple but powerful example of culturally relevant teaching as well!) The day of the activity, they wrote down feelings on pieces of paper and posted those papers around the room. I love the words they chose the day of the conference: contemplative, warm, alive, vulnerable, joyful, frustrated, nostalgic, and lonely. So often when I provide students with feelings to identify with, they are relatively clear-cut emotions such as happy, sad, or angry. These feelings were far more nuanced and could provoke deeper thoughts for older students who are likely more capable of identifying the subtler differences in their feelings. Mother Nature's DJ, DJ Cymba, played music for us. The music played for a short while, during which time each participant moved to the paper they felt best represented what they were feeling.

Some of the conference attendees just walked, but others danced to the sign that represented the way they felt. Most of our students would be moving to the music if the music came from a playlist of songs they love. That opportunity to physically

react to the music and make an emotional connection is powerful. When everyone had moved to a feeling that represented how the music made them feel, the music stopped and Mother Nature asked for one person from each group to share why they chose the feeling they did. Every answer was accepted without judgement. Once one person per feeling had shared, the exercise repeated with new music.

This seemingly simple activity had so many meaningful layers to it. That it is the music students have shared they are currently listening to is so empowering. There is a community aspect because participants are all listening to the same music and moving around the room at the same time. There is an additional layer of community with the people who choose the same feeling as you. There is time for personal interaction with and reflection on the music as you move to it and consider how it makes you feel and what memories it may bring up. It was so joyful and it had so much meaning. For more information on Mother Nature, visit mothernaturebarz.com.

GIVING OURSELVES GRACE AS WE GROW

We know that students' social-emotional development is a process that takes place over years. We do not expect students to wake up one morning and suddenly have all the SEL competencies they need to be happy, healthy, functioning adults. Growth takes time and includes mistakes that spur further growth. Yet I often expect myself to gain new skills overnight. I expect that my carefully researched and (what I believe to be) well-laid plans will come off, without any hitches, on my original timetable. I also tend to (foolishly) think that if plans are carefully researched and well-laid, I can implement many of them at once without having any hiccups.

Some of the things I have implemented in the last few years have come off without a hitch. I began greeting every elementary school student at the door without seeing any unexpected concerns or consequences. There has only been increased positive interactions between me and my students and an improved classroom culture. The same goes for having my middle school students check in at the beginning of each class period. They complete it without complaint and have time to reflect on how they are really doing, while I gain valuable insight into my students as human beings and how their emotional state may be impacting their learning that day.

Other plans of mine have experienced bumps in the road. Circles at the elementary school level are going great when they happen, but I am struggling to find time for them regularly, particularly when certain deadlines need to be met, such as preparing students for a concert. I am still working on finding a clear path forward on how to

best incorporate them regularly in my classroom, but I know I will find a solution. Circles at the middle school level have yielded mixed results. In one trimester my first period class did well with them, sharing honest answers with each other both when somewhat deeper questions were posed and when lighter ones were. My second period class that same trimester turned even the lighthearted questions, which were crafted to feel non-threatening, into complete jokes and honestly gained nothing from the experience. I am still working to pinpoint what was different between those two classes so that, inasmuch as possible, I can ameliorate the issues that arose in that second class.

Good things are happening in my classroom because of the very intentional work I am putting in. Regardless of bumps in the road, my students are growing as human beings and musicians, and it is okay that not everything is implemented perfectly the first time I try. I think my students deserve room for growth and that encouragement, but I find it significantly more difficult to treat myself with the same kindness. I am still learning to allow myself to grow as an educator without judgement and while focusing on the positive things I do, which is the way I already approach my students' growth each day.

WORK IN PROGRESS

My classroom is a happier place for all my students since I started intentionally incorporating SEL and began looking for ways to accentuate the SEL that was already naturally taking place. We are still making a lot of music and learning a lot about music. Time spent on music alone has decreased some, but the amount and depth of learning has not. Taking time to attend to student social-emotional needs and to build up the classroom community within music class specifically has paid dividends. The time we spend on music is far more productive because I am stopping class less to deal with disruptive behaviors. The unmet needs that lead students to act in ways that disrupt our class can often be met through the SEL in our class and our community building. When students work in small groups I can see the kinder ways they interact with each other.

SEL is not a cure-all for the difficulties students carry with them to school each day. Those burdens are complex, and a single teacher or type of learning cannot solve them. There are still really hard days, and there are still days where I feel like a complete failure at the end of a class. There are still days I cry at lunch. SEL helps a lot, though. It helps my students have their needs better met, and it helps me see

my students as people first, musicians second, and students third. Working on my own social-emotional competencies is making me a better teacher for my students. There is a different atmosphere in my classroom. My students and I are still works in progress, but we are all treating each other more kindly and taking time to get to know each other better. We are working on developing our self-awareness, our self-management, and our social awareness, improving our relationship skills, and making responsible decisions. We are able to make more music and more meaningful music because of this work. We are gaining a deeper understanding of music because we can use the time we have more productively and to make deeper emotional connections to the music we listen to, perform, and compose. Social Emotional Learning is helping me be a better teacher for my students, helping my students be better young musicians and learners, and is making our classroom a happier place to learn and make music.