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**SUPPORTING Social Emotional Learning (SEL) with Meals in the Classroom (MIC)**

**What is Social Emotional Learning (SEL)?**

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social-emotional learning (SEL) as “*the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions*.” Research shows that well-implemented, evidence-based SEL programs contribute to improved academic achievement, lead to improved behavior, and have a strong return on investment. <https://casel.org/impact>

**How can a Meals in the Classroom (MIC) program support SEL?**

Students are learning all the time, even at mealtimes. MIC programs can help support SEL by contributing to a positive social climate, building relationships between staff and students, and helping students develop life skills. Nurturing positive environments is particularly important during a time of general anxiety and uncertainty.

**How can MIC increase engagement among students and adults in school?**

Eating together with classmates, teachers, and paraeducators can create opportunities for conversations that might not otherwise occur. This often allows for teachers to see, hear, and learn important things about their students’ lives. Conversations among students can help develop positive peer relationships that extend beyond mealtime. These conversations also can help build language skills that contribute to improved social interactions.

**How can teachers, paraeducators, and other school staff help build relationships during MIC?**

When adults and students enjoy meals together, they have a chance to engage in conversation. A calm, comfortable atmosphere during mealtime helps students enjoy their food while developing a sense of community in the classroom. With some direction to the conversation, lessons can be extended to mealtime and students can have the opportunity to learn about each other’s cultures and traditions by talking about the foods they eat at home and different mealtime routines and practices.

**How can MIC help foster responsibility and independence?**

An important element of building an environment that promotes SEL is helping students develop practices and skills that contribute to the community. Students can play an active role in MIC programs, practicing self-management and responsibility by helping to organize and conduct age-appropriate meal service and clean up duties, and learning the life-skills that accompany these tasks.

Adapted with permission from ***Supporting Social-Emotional Learning (SEL),*** Best Practices from Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom (PBIC), https://rebrand.ly/SocialEmotionalLearning/Support