

SEL and World Languages in Linden Public Schools



Social and emotional learning (SEL) is commonly described as a process where learners acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage, emotions, and to feel and show empathy for others. This results in learners being able to achieve personal and collective goals while establishing and maintaining supportive relationships and to make caring decisions.

The discipline of World Languages is particularly well-suited for addressing and supporting students' SEL development. Research in second language acquisition informs us of the key role that affective factors play in language learning, as a learner's emotional state can act as a filter that can impede learning. For this reason, teachers in the Linden Public Schools work to help students develop a positive mindset around language learning, bolstering their confidence and designing lessons that connect directly to students' interests, identities and cultures. Teachers provide safe, welcoming environments using student-centered teaching methods that promote engagement and a harmonious classroom climate.

In Linden High School's Heritage Spanish class, students with cultural roots from across Latin America put aside their differences and rivalries to focus on their commonalities and shared challenges. In Rocio Horzepa's class, students begin their daily classes by reciting together a poem with roots in the indigenous Mayan culture called "In Lak'ech," which in translation reads:

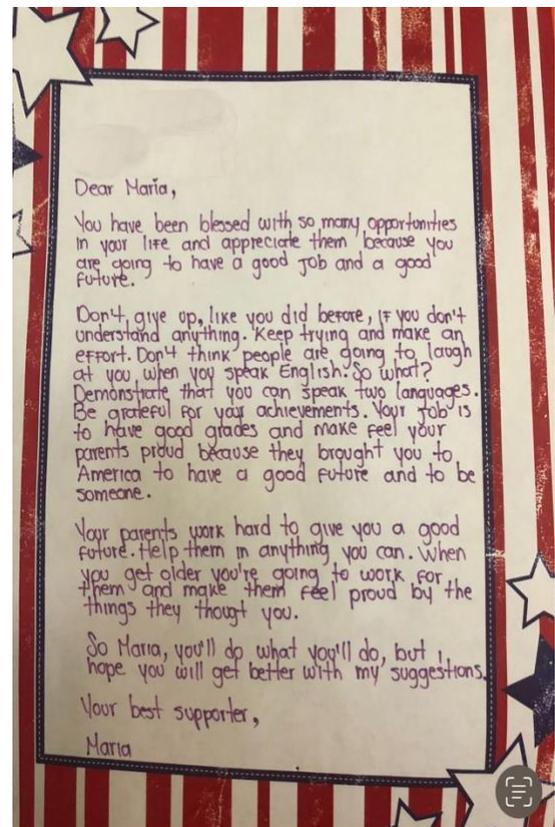
"You are my other self. If I do harm to you, I do harm to myself. If I love and respect you, then I love and respect myself."

Students were so moved by the poem and their class ritual, that they worked together to create a mural outside of their classroom to illustrate and display the poem as a message to the entire student body.



Many of the SEL focused activities in the World Language classroom provide students with an opportunity to explore and examine their own identities through their language learning experiences. Heritage students explore the many terms used to describe identity among Spanish speakers, such as Hispanic, Latinx, Mestizo, Afro-Latino, etc. Students reflect on these labels, and create illustrated self-portraits surrounded by their writing in Spanish where they share their thoughts on their emerging cultural identities. This activity gives students the opportunity to reflect on previous class readings and discussions, while developing their own self-awareness, which involves emotions, perceptions, and confidence.

Similarly, ESL students enjoyed an activity where they created self-portraits which included a "Dear Me" letter, where students imagined they could go back in time and give themselves advice when they were new immigrants to the United States.



Supportive and encouraging activities such as these help to develop students' positive feelings about language learning, serving as part of a strength-based approach to teaching that promotes students' self-confidence and instills a sense of autonomy in their learning. Since the journey to language proficiency requires years of dedicated study, the infusion of SEL into a student-centered pedagogical approach is essential in helping students develop the positive mindset for language learning and the resilience that the journey requires.