



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

09.13.19

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Region One GEAR UP to address Social Emotional Learning and its Impact on Academic Achievement through Partnership with ACT's Center for Equity in Learning

Region One GEAR UP Recognized for Work in Social Emotional Learning-Invited to Participate in Long-Range Study to Support Under-Served Students

For the past eight years, Region One ESC GEAR UP has included a Social Emotional Skills assessment, ACT Engage, in their work with students to allow them to analyze their levels of social engagement, self-regulation, and motivation. By being aware of their emotions, says Norma O. McCormick, Director of the Region One ESC Office of College, Career, and Life Readiness, students and adults are better able to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relations, and make responsible decisions. McCormick says this is important because when students feel connected emotionally to peers and educators with high values of learning and expectations of academic success, they adopt these values and it can affect how they respond to situations such as learning, and classroom performance.

Expanding on the available SEL research, McCormick explains that Region One GEAR UP conducted a longitudinal study which concluded that an emphasis on a student's emotional learning, as well as their academic learning, appeared to improve the likelihood that students would achieve higher levels of academic performance.

"We have worked on Social Emotional Learning supports for our students, parents and leaders in efforts such as our TIES (Together in Education Success) Conferences which focuses on male students who are needing additional support and mentoring; along with the I AM conferences which have focused on helping our female students see that they are capable, intelligent and strong," says McCormick. "These efforts have been based on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) research and have utilized the equity lens to reduce the opportunity gap for all students."

The value of that work was recognized by the ACT's Center for Equity in Learning and ACT has now included Region One GEAR UP to be a part of a year-long innovative study expanding on the area of Social Emotional Learning utilizing a new assessment tool, ACT Tessera, an advanced, multimodal assessment tool that measures Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills to help educators measure and evaluate students' strengths and identify interventions.

Region One Education Service Center (www.esc1.net) serves over 437,000 students and educators in seven counties in south Texas including Cameron, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Starr, Webb, Willacy and Zapata counties. Region One works to assist school districts in improving student performance, assist districts to operate more efficiently and economically, and implement initiatives assigned by the legislature or the Commissioner of Education.

“We feel honored to have been selected by ACT as a partner due to our work with our GEAR UP campuses, says Melissa I. Lopez, Administrator of the Region One ESC Office of College, Career, and Life Readiness. Lopez adds that research shows work in SEL has demonstrated that students perform better academically when they experience a sense of belonging at school and learn in environments characterized by positive relationships.”

“We believe ed tech tools hold great promise in this area,” said Tonika Cheek Clayton, Managing Partner at NewSchools Venture Fund. “ACT Tessera has the potential to increase equity and improve academic outcomes by supporting the development of social-emotional competencies as well as improvements in school culture and climate. That’s why NewSchools Ignite is proud to invest in ACT.”

The long-term benefits of this research study can impact our approach to instruction by integrating some of the “lessons learned” through this grant about what works for students and provides them with supports that will ensure they feel valued and integrated into their classrooms, explains McCormick. Our aim is to create safe and nurturing classrooms that address the needs of all learners is important to this effort. Through this grant with the ACT Center for Equity in Learning, Region One Education Service Center will continue to support the educational community by ensuring that integration of best practices and research continues to be the focus of ongoing work.

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