

Supporting SEL With Pennsylvania PBS

By Debra J. Riek



About the Author: Debra J. Riek, M.Ed., is the Director of Education at Pennsylvania PBS station WITF in Harrisburg Pennsylvania. She taught first grade in Baltimore City School District and was an early education director for over 15 years. She is a certified Pennsylvania Quality Assurance System (PQAS) instructor and has provided professional development at local, state and national conferences.

Ms. Riek has two bachelors' degrees – communications and elementary education – and was certified to teach in Pennsylvania and Maryland. She also has a master's degree in early education and curriculum.

During the beginning of the pandemic, it became clear that Pennsylvania PBS stations were uniquely positioned to make important connections to support students academically. **PBS Kids** programming was already created with education components first and entertainment second which provided helpful content. By providing books and school supplies in grab and go bags, coordinating on-air programming to curricular goals and working closely with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and Intermediate Units, stations across Pennsylvania, and across the country, we were able to help meet some of the immediate needs of students and families.

As the pandemic wore on and students realized they would be returning to a much different school experience or may not be returning to school at all, Pennsylvania PBS stations began to highlight current resources and develop new offerings around Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). All seven PBS stations in Pennsylvania, from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia, have resources to share with educators who work with all ages.

For the youngest learners in the state, **PBS Kids** on air programming like *Daniel Tiger* and *Sesame Street* help children think about their feelings and concerns. The **PBS Kids** schedule is available by content area on the Pennsylvania PBS website (<https://pennsylvaniapbs.org/>). Teachers and families can also explore standards-based lessons around social and emotional learning for young children on PBS LearningMedia. This curated, free resource helps educators explore lots of topics but has a very vibrant collection of lesson plans and videos related to SEL (<https://witf.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/ready-to-learn/learning-domain/social-and-emotional-learning/>). Locally created **Ready Set Music** is also a wonderful resource for young students. Built with the legacy of Mr. Rogers in mind, **Ready Set Music** used songs, performed in a variety of genres by local musicians, to teach positive ideas to children. Songs helped young children remember it is ok to ask for help, it is important to talk about how they are feeling and change can be tricky. Each song is accompanied by printable social stories and standards-based classroom activities.

Individual stations also have wonderful contributions to the SEL landscape like WQLN's **Steps to Kindergarten**. The content of this program was created with the help of professional educators who identified the significant learning gaps of incoming kindergarten students. **Steps to Kindergarten** helps families prepare their preschoolers for a successful transition to kindergarten. This three-week workshop uses the **PBS Ready to Learn** learning triangle (Read, View, Do) model of instruction, demonstrating that academic and social-emotional learning takes place congruently. Along with academic skills, parents/grown-ups receive tips and strategies to help their young learners with:

- ✓ Controlling impulses and self-regulation
- ✓ Perform basic self-help/self-care tasks
- ✓ Work and play cooperatively with peers
- ✓ Sit for 10 minutes
- ✓ Able to separate easily from grown-up

National resources like **PBS Parents** (<https://www.pbs.org/parents>), **Sesame in Communities** (<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/>) and the **Fred Rogers Company** (<https://www.fredrogers.org/>) also offer rich resources around social and emotional learning for pre-kindergarten through elementary-aged students.

For elementary-aged students, station WQED in Pittsburgh has devoted a wealth of resources to families navigating their children's mental health and well-being at home, in schools and in communities. In an effort to meet those needs, WQED offers **Explore More** wellness backpacks to families in the region.

These backpacks are a fun way for kids and families to connect with resources and content offered by WQED through its Pre-K-3 programming on its main channel and 24-hour children's programming on the WQED PBS KIDS Channel. The backpacks contain supplies to extend learning beyond the screen and offer hands-on family activities using

Continued on next page

PBS Kids assets. Materials are family-centered and engagement-oriented and promote mental health and physical and mental wellness. Backpacks include things like yoga mats, stress balls and playdough, journals, bubbles, mental health resources and more.

SEL resources are distributed to schools each school year and monthly in WVIA's literacy program, ***PBS Kids in the Classroom***. The resources are SEL-focused and include mood magnets that help identify how individuals feel without the need to verbalize, mood pencils and rulers to raise awareness for mood and feelings, stress balls, coloring pages and connections to resources/social service organizations.

Social and emotional learning doesn't end when students get older. For middle and high school students, several stations offer events designed to promote creative artistic expression. These kinds of experiences help to build confidence, encourage empathy and acceptance of differences and can be a calming coping strategy for anxious students struggling with big emotions. PBS LearningMedia also offers additional resources and lesson plans specifically designed with older students in mind. Thousands of PBS resources are tied to lesson plans like *Portraits and Dreams: Framing and Point of View in Self and Community Portraits* that analyzes the works of student photographers and telling their community story (<https://witf.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/portraits-and-dreams-lesson-plan/framing-and-point-of-view-video-gallery-portraits-and-dreams/>). Additionally, Student Reporting Labs from PBS NewsHour, has a podcast called "On Our Minds," which is a student-led, hosted and produced podcast series about

“**Additionally, many stations across the state offer professional development experiences for educators.**”

the biggest mental health challenges young people face. Also from Student Reporting Labs, "Our New Normal" showcased teen voices and young students in conversation with experts and their peers about mental health and wellness, along with other school-related topics.

Additionally, many stations across the state offer professional development experiences for educators. WVIA has professional development workshops that help educate teachers and families about grief and anxiety and provide resources to encourage advocacy. WPSU recently held a workshop for educators,

A Conscious Education: Creating a Conscious Experience for Educators to Thrive. The session focused on our neurological responses from trauma and how that impacts our responses and reactions to when we experience triggers. Understanding our own personal traumas better equips us to support students and provide healthier responses in stressful situations. The workshop can be found at www.wpsu.org/educators. WPSU also produced "Speaking Grief," which offers strategies on how adults and children can respond when one of their peers or students are experiencing grief. Additional professional development can be found here: <https://www.wlvt.org/education/distance-learning/for-educators/> and <https://pennsylvaniapbs.org/learning-at-school/>

As we all manage our feelings about the last two years, it is good to know that the partnerships between educational spaces and public media continue to grow. For more information about offerings at your local Pennsylvania PBS station, please visit pennsylvaniapbs.org

Submit a Review for Magazine Feature... READERS FOR LEADERS

We are seeking educational book reviews for our newest magazine column, "**READERS FOR LEADERS**," but only for books that you have found valuable and would "recommend" to your colleagues. Educators are constantly looking for new ideas to use and share, but do not always have time to read new books. It is our hope that this column will provide you with the latest in contemporary readings.

Book reviews should be no more than 350-400 words, written using APA style and must be submitted as a Word document (with a brief biographical sketch and a photo of the author). Authors may not be the book's author since the purpose of the review is **to provide information and NOT to sell books!** In addition, authors **MUST include a written statement of any connection to the publication being reviewed. For example:** *The book being reviewed is part of a book selection for a principal certification course (OR...Administrator Professional Development). I have no affiliation with the author(s) or publishing company(ies) of the book(s) in the submitted book review(s).*

The deadline to submit a book review for the next magazine is July 15, 2022.