

Activities for International SEL Day March 11, 2022

🕒 February 28, 2022 • 📁 Featured (<https://www.njea.org/category/top-stories/featured/>) • 🕒 7 minutes to read



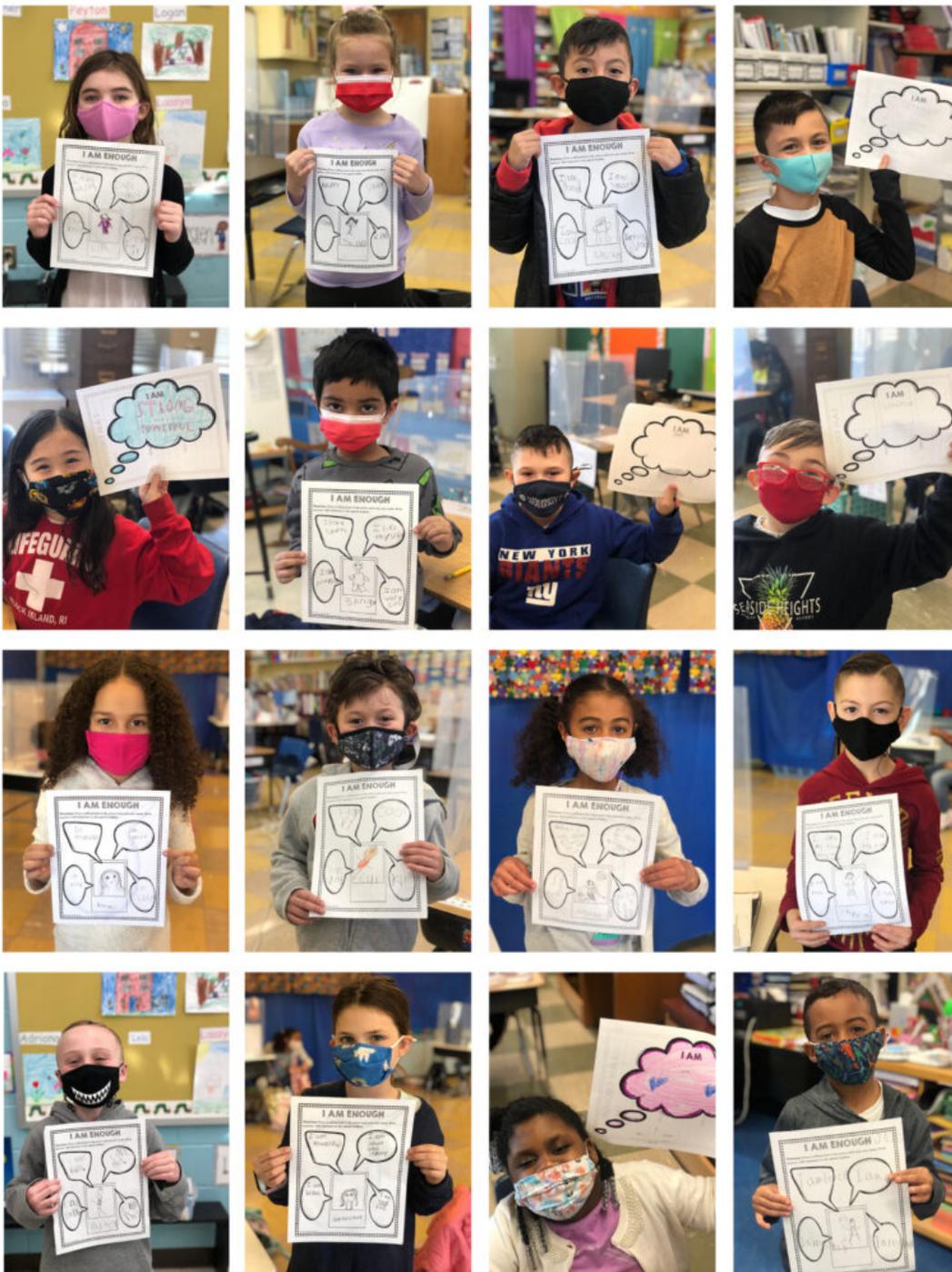
Students at MacKay Elementary School writing positive messages on the sidewalk.

By Maurice J. Elias and Jennifer Ly, Rutgers University

International SEL Day is right around the corner: March 11, 2022. It's a day when schools, communities, and parents will celebrate the importance of promoting children's social-emotional and character development. And the evidence is clear: social and emotional skills are like vitamins. They make children—and us—stronger so that we are better at whatever it is we want to do, particularly when it involves other people.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is not for SEL Day alone. Sharing SEL-related work throughout the year will help create momentum for counting social-emotional skills as essential for success in school and life.

Like many schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, yours may have had intentions to do more with SEL than time has allowed. Well, to help you get on the bandwagon for SEL Day 2022, we have ideas to share to get you going. We have gathered ideas from New Jersey schools and from SEL4US and SEL Day headquarters ([SEL4US.org \(http://SEL4US.org\)](http://SEL4US.org) and [SELDay.org \(http://SELDay.org\)](http://SELDay.org)). We'll start with what some schools in Montville, Lodi, and Tenafly did successfully for SEL Day 2021.



The students from Woodmont Elementary School showing off their "I Am Enough" posters.

Woodmont Elementary School

When you pull up to Woodmont Elementary School in Montville on SEL Day, you are likely to see a message on the roadside board that reads, "You are enough just the way you are." Having observed that students were doubting themselves, the message reflected media specialist Toni-Ann Raj's and school counselor Doug Stech's aspiration to remind students that they are valued, worthy, and loved.

“With the unusual school year, we were being told students were struggling with self-image because of their separation from their normal routine such as clubs, sports, hobbies, and friendships,” Raj said.

To help the students recognize their self-worth, Raj took inspiration from the book *I Am Enough*, by Grace Byers. This uplifting book tells a story of self-empowerment and what it means to honor and embrace people’s differences. The illustrations from the book authentically showcase characters from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, in which many students can see themselves through these characters.

Stech and Raj developed a lesson plan for the students to create posters that reflected how they view themselves. The goal was for the students to shift their focus on themselves and not worry about how others see them.

“We didn’t want students to write what they thought people would identify about them. We wanted them to focus on qualities not everyone would know about them or something about themselves they are proud of,” Raj said.

The students completed “I Am Enough” worksheets where they were instructed to write “I Am” statements about themselves. In class, they read the book and were encouraged to engage in a mindfulness activity for self-reflection.

I Am Enough Lesson Plan

1. As a class, read the book, *I Am Enough*, by Grace Byers
2. Begin a discussion and ask the students to highlight important lessons or themes they learned from the book.
3. Hand out worksheets and have the students fill in the blank: “I am _____” with an attribute/aspect of their character that describes who they are. For example, “I am brave.”
4. Have the students share what they wrote with the rest of the class.
5. Have the students engage in a mindfulness activity to self-reflect on what they learned.

Repeat with one or two other attributes as time and need allow.

Many students—elementary, middle, and high school—are experiencing feelings similar to those students feel at Woodmont. And even if they are not, there are many benefits to positive affirmation. Adapt this activity for your setting for SEL Day or as soon as you can thereafter. With all the talk about “learning loss,” it’s no wonder students are in a state of anxiety and doubt. You may want to add an element to this activity based on worksheets helping students articulate “What I have learned” and/or “How I am better” since the onset of COVID-19.



The staff from Hilltop Elementary School mixing essential oils during their mini wellness retreat.

Lodi Public Schools

Lodi High School

Like many others across New Jersey and the United States, students at Lodi High School reported feeling overwhelmed and are experiencing a great deal of stress. Lodi High School's counseling interns, along with their supervisor, created a thorough and helpful mental health awareness PowerPoint that you can download at bit.ly/lodi-mha (<http://bit.ly/lodi-mha>).

The PowerPoint provides high schoolers with mental health resources and tips and techniques on how to practice mindfulness and how to cope with stress. You can easily adapt the PowerPoint and personalize it for your high school or middle school.

Giving this to students—and sharing it with parents—will be helpful to them and will be in the spirit of SEL Day. It's not just valuable in the COVID context. It's a great help for the many stresses secondary school students are subjected to. You can deepen the impact by having biology teachers spend some time focusing on the physiology of stress, coping, and calming.

Hilltop Elementary School

Hilltop Elementary School in Lodi is an overflowing fountain of SEL creativity! The video they created to highlight their work throughout the 2020–21 school year will give you many ideas for SEL Day 2022. You can view it at youtu.be/SAdlznpfV50 (<http://youtu.be/SAdlznpfV50>).

Part of SEL involves caring for others, which is hard if you don't also care for yourself. Recognizing the pressures and challenges staff have been facing, school counselors in Lodi organized a mini wellness retreat for the elementary staff by setting up different stations with relaxing activities. Hilltop educators were able to recharge and connect with their colleagues. Consider enlisting colleagues in your school to do this either on or after SEL Day this year.

Mini Wellness Retreat at Hilltop Elementary School

Station 1: Aromatherapy

Staff members created a special blend to take home or keep in the classroom/office. Visuals were provided to capture the benefit of each oil and the advantages that essential oils offer once they are combined.

Station 2: Massage and Dog Therapy

Staff relaxed in a multifunction heated massage chair and also experimented with a Hypervolt massage gun. The Hypervolt has numerous attachments that help in targeting problematic areas. In hopes of reducing stress levels, a service greyhound, Royal Payne, provided emotional support to our staff.

Station 3: Self-Care Bingo and Prizes

Staff connected on a profound level by discussing notable and heartfelt topics such as setting boundaries, embracing humanity instead of perfection, trying out a new recipe, dancing to their favorite songs, spending time with those who support them, and more.

Mackay Elementary School

In Mackay Elementary School in Tenafly, a group of fifth-graders known as the Peacebuilders is committed to making a positive difference in their school. They meet monthly to brainstorm and discuss ways to maintain a safe and supportive space for students and staff.

During one of these meetings, the Peacebuilders came up with the Positive Messages idea. The fifth-grade students developed a list of the positive quotes and phrases. On SEL Day, the students wrote positive messages around the perimeter of the school on sidewalks and on rocks placed in the school garden. Once the rest of the school community saw the messages, they decided to adopt the activity.



Fourth- and fifth-graders from MacKay Elementary School decorated rocks and wrote powerful words on them to be displayed in the school's garden.

This engaging lesson gives the students an opportunity to feel like a valued part of the school community, to connect with their peers, and to make the school a warm and welcoming environment in which to be.

If you do this activity, extend it by having students speak to one another in rotating pairs or small groups about what word or message they chose and why. Having them then introduce a classmate's thoughts to the rest of the class gives students a chance to practice important SEL communication and presentation skills.

MacKay created a video to that summarizes how they celebrate SEL Day 2021. You can view it at youtu.be/z6hXedyrm3w (<http://youtu.be/z6hXedyrm3w>).

Maurice J. Elias is the director of the Rutgers University Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab, which has worked over the past three decades to promote research, policy, and practice to benefit schools nationally and internationally. The lab can be reached at SECDLab@gmail.com (<mailto:SECDLab@gmail.com>).

Jennifer Ly, a student at Rutgers University, is a social media intern and the social media liaison for the Social-Emotional Alliance for New Jersey (SEL4NJ.org (<http://SEL4NJ.org>)).

SEL Day Activities Toolkit

If you have not seen an idea yet that sparks your interest or you want more, here are some additional ideas from the Activities Toolkit created by the SEL Day team for 2022. They are based on practices used in New Jersey and other states' schools in 2021, and they are simple ways to join the SEL Day celebration now.

Have an idea to add to our list? Email us at info@sel4us.org (<mailto:info@sel4us.org>) to share your suggested additions.

Assemblies

- Organize an assembly on SEL Day to share skits, songs or original writing that celebrate and showcase SEL.
- Organize an assembly on SEL Day with a guest speaker or performance related to key SEL skills.

Morning announcements

- During morning announcements on SEL Day, read a poem, quote, or fable that connects to SEL.

Displays

- Create and display SEL Day posters that highlight SEL skills and classroom or school core values.
- Design an SEL Day bulletin board featuring a tree with SEL skills written on the leaves or that highlights aspects of positive character.

Library

- Create a library area or bookshelf in honor of SEL Day.
- Feature SEL-themed books in a read-aloud program during the week of SEL Day.
- Ask families to donate SEL-themed books in honor of SEL Day.
- Distribute lists of SEL-themed books on SEL Day.

Contests

- Hold a contest to create SEL artifacts (e.g., artwork, poetry, stories, videos) and announce winners on SEL Day while still making sure all participants receive positive recognition.

Family engagement

- Showcase SEL activities and artifacts (e.g. artwork, performance, video) with families at a special SEL Day event.
- Share information about SEL and positive character development during a March PTO/PTA meeting or other family event.

Staff and leadership

- Share best practices for integrating SEL and character development or focus on analyzing SEL assessment data at a staff meeting in March.
- Consider regular, shared staff mindful moments on SEL Day and thereafter.
- Feature SEL in a family newsletter in honor of SEL Day.

Find more activities at [SEL Day Activities Toolkit](#)

(<https://docs.google.com/document/d/13o6dmg1j0l664lkw3yB-3ZnsI7HJ4k6br9IQJaMprQY/view>)

Let others know what you are doing

If you create an artifact, which many New Jersey schools did last year for SEL Day, please send a copy of your artifact (video, photos, blogs, podcasts, etc.) with the theme of your artifact included in the subject line to info@sel4nj.org (<mailto:info@sel4nj.org>). Ideally use only one or two words in the subject line, such as kindness, connection, staff morale, student voice, or respect. SEL4NJ will be sure to tweet and share the artifact on SEL Day.

The inside track

Want to learn more about SEL Day in Montville, Tenafly, Lodi or from the SEL lab at Rutgers? Here's the contact information for some key players.

Woodmont Elementary – Montville

Toni-Ann Raj – Media Specialist toniann.raj@montville.net
(<mailto:toniann.raj@montville.net>)

Douglass Stech – School Counselor douglas.stech@montville.net
(<mailto:douglas.stech@montville.net>)

Mackay Elementary – Tenafly Public Schools

Jennifer Angerson – School Counselor jangerson@tenafly.k12.nj.us
(<mailto:jangerson@tenafly.k12.nj.us>)

Dr. Evelyn Mamman – Assistant Superintendent + SEL

Coordinator emamman@tenafly.k12.nj.us (<mailto:emamman@tenafly.k12.nj.us>)

Lodi Public Schools

Christine Orosz – Supervisor and School Counseling

Department christine.orosz@lodi.k12.nj.us (<mailto:christine.orosz@lodi.k12.nj.us>)

Rutgers University Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab

Maurice Elias and Jennifer Ly SECDLab@gmail.com (<mailto:SECDLab@gmail.com>)



For Members

Preservice (<https://www.njea.org/preservice/>)

Educational Support Professionals

(<https://www.njea.org/educational-support-professionals/>)

Higher Education (<https://www.njea.org/higher-education/>)

Classroom Teachers

(<https://www.njea.org/classroom-teachers/>)

Affinity Groups

Early Career (<https://www.njea.org/early-career/>)

Members of Color

(<https://www.njea.org/members-of-color/>)

Public Charter Members

(<https://www.njea.org/public-charter-members/>)

Equity (<https://www.njea.org/equity/>)

Retirement

NJREA (<https://www.njea.org/njrea/>)

Retirement Planning

(<https://www.njea.org/retirement-planning/>)

Grants

HIPP Foundation (<https://www.njea.org/hipp-foundation/>)

PRIDE (<https://www.njea.org/pride/>)

Other Grants (<https://www.njea.org/other-grants/>)

Advocacy

Action Center (<https://actioncenter.njea.org>)

Pensions & Health Benefits

(<https://www.njea.org/pensions-health-benefits/>)

High Stakes Testing (<https://www.njea.org/high-stakes-testing/>)

Health & Safety (<https://www.njea.org/health-safety/>)

Evaluation (<https://www.njea.org/evaluation/>)

Student Loan Debt (<https://www.njea.org/student-loan-debt/>)

Learning

Professional Learning (<https://learning.njea.org>)

NJEA Convention (<https://njeaconvention.njea.org>)

Conferences

(<https://www.njea.org/events/category/conferences/>)

Community

Family Involvement (<https://www.njea.org/family-involvement/>)

FAST (<https://www.njea.org/fast/>)

Read Across New Jersey

(<https://www.njea.org/read-across-new-jersey/>)

Events

NJEA (/events)

Webinars

(<https://www.njea.org/events/category/webinars/>)

Workshops

(<https://www.njea.org/events/category/workshops/>)

Member Benefits

(<https://www.njea.org/events/category/member-benefits/>)

About

History (<https://www.njea.org/history/>)

Leadership (<https://www.njea.org/leadership/>)

Regional Offices (<https://www.njea.org/regional-offices/>)

Jobs @ NJEA (<https://www.njea.org/jobs-njea/>)

Partners

Affiliated Groups (<https://www.njea.org/affiliated-groups/>)

Center for Future Educators

(<https://www.njea.org/center-for-future-educators/>)

NJ Center for Teaching & Learning

(<https://www.njea.org/nj-center-for-teaching-learning/>)

More

Good News About NJ Public Schools

(<https://www.njea.org/goodnews/>)

Contact NJEA

180 W. State Street, Trenton, NJ 08608

Work: 1-609-599-4561

Fax: 1-609-392-6321

Contact Now (<https://www.njea.org/contact/>)

Mailing Address

Box 1211

Trenton, NJ 08607-1211

GPS Address

This address will bring you to NJEA's secured,
staffed parking lot with lights behind the building.
100 Capitol Street, Trenton, NJ 08607

Member Helpline

1-866-AID-NJEA

1-866-243-6532

Email (<mailto:aid-njea@ubhc.rutgers.edu>)

Website

(<https://memberbenefits.njea.org/member-helpline/>)

NJEA State Officers



([/president/](#))
Stephen M. Spiller
President



([/vice-president/](#))
Steven B. Gandy
Vice President



([/secretary-treasurer/](#))
Peter Robertson
Secretary-Treasurer

)  [pinterest\(https://www.pinterest.com/njeapinterest/\)](https://www.pinterest.com/njeapinterest/)  [podcast\(https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/member-voices-an-njea-podcast/id1486008135\)](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/member-voices-an-njea-podcast/id1486008135)

Copyright 2022 New Jersey Education Association. All Rights Reserved. / [Privacy \(/privacy\)](#) / [Terms of Service \(/terms-of-service\)](#)