

SCOE/LifeWorks Program

Providing services for students with emotional and behavioral difficulties

The Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE) and Sonoma County Mental Health (SCMH) department have collaboratively developed the SCOE/LifeWorks Program to meet the unique needs of students between the ages of 5 and 22 who exhibit emotional and behavioral challenges. The program is dedicated to helping these students manage significant emotional reactions, learn to behave responsibly, increase positive social interactions, increase resilience, and improve academic progress.

The program consists of a continuum of special education classes designed to give students access to the core curriculum in a setting that allows them to benefit from individual, small group, and family counseling. The classes are located on local school campuses and mental health services are integrated into the school day. These services are provided by LifeWorks, a non-public agency specializing in therapeutic services and support. Two key premises have guided the development of the program:

Academic and behavioral success are linked. Once a student begins to experience behavioral or academic success, a path is cleared for improved functioning.

Troubled children can be helped through a strategy of positive behavior support, which preserves students' dignity and provides them with a sense of hope.

Three additional values are integrated in the SCOE/LifeWorks Program:

Respect for children. Being positive toward children and treating them with dignity is a core value of the program.

Staffing by skilled and experienced professionals. Skilled and experienced professionals are essential to meeting students' special needs. To be effective, staff must be able to support positive student behavior, facilitate inclusion, and demonstrate commitment to lifelong learning.

Commitment to children and families. This program "goes the extra mile" for children and provides support to students' families.

Program description: The SCOE/LifeWorks Program uses all available skills and resources to create an educational and therapeutic community that provides a structured, nurturing environment for students and develops their self-esteem. In this program:

- Describing and reshaping the observable behaviors of students is the programmatic and therapeutic focus.
- Students are taught to manage anger in appropriate ways and learn new ways of responding, thus clearing the way for improved academic learning.
- Interventions that emphasize self-monitoring, self-control, and self-management strategies are combined with instruction that teaches social norms and expectations for classroom behavior.
- Teachers continuously role-model appropriate ways to deal with feelings within the classroom.
- Parents are an extremely important part of the team and parental support of students and of program guidelines is crucial.
- Individual educational programs are developed to promote students' social development and academic success.
- Students learn beneficial and socially appropriate ways to manage their emotions.
- Students are referred and transitioned to less restrictive educational placements through successful completion of the program.
- Students may be referred and transitioned to settings with more intensive and comprehensive services if the program fails to meet the students' emotional or behavioral needs.

Classes in the SCOE/LifeWorks Program are small—typically about ten students. The program relies on the collaborative interaction of participating agencies and combined staffing that includes credentialed special education teachers, special education teaching assistants, licensed therapists, and a school nurse, school psychologist, psychiatrist (for students with SCMH services), and program administrator. Counseling services are provided under contract by LifeWorks, a nonprofit agency specializing in therapeutic support for students. Services provided include:

Student counseling: Individual and group therapy, education-related counseling, community meetings, focus groups, and crisis management.

Support services: School support/consultation, program evaluation, psychological assessment, and psychiatric intervention and monitoring (for students with SCMH services).

Case management services: Family and community partnerships, home visits, resource development, assistance accessing additional support services, and community-based support.

Assessment: Diagnostic evaluation, academic monitoring, and monitoring of ability to progress within a structured environment.

The academic program: Behavior and academic competence are concurrent, but separate, goals in the SCOE/LifeWorks Program. The academic environment naturally creates situations where students are taught positive behaviors as they learn to listen to the teacher and ask questions using appropriate language and actions.

- Learning takes place in comfortable and attractive physical environments, in an atmosphere of support and respect where each student's abilities are affirmed and valued. Students in the high school program earn credits that are applied toward a diploma or certificate of completion. Graduation requirements are aligned with the student's school of residence rather than school of attendance (unless they are one and the same).
- Mistakes are analyzed constructively and viewed as natural steps in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding.
- Instruction is individualized. Students and teachers set learning goals that are realistic, but also challenging, attainable, pertinent to students' future aspirations, and aligned with state standards.
- Learning is connected to the real world and students learn how to apply what they learn to their lives and their communities.
- Learning is an interactive process that models and supports the values of responsibility, honesty, personal choice, and self-direction.
- Learning is diagnostic and reflective. The academic program is designed to provide continuous feedback to students and parents. Students participate in state assessments, as well as individually administered standardized testing. Assessment is used as a tool to further teaching and learning.

Mental health services: Mental health services are provided by LifeWorks counselors in the classroom and, at times, in the home. These services are individualized to meet each student's needs. They focus on interventions that enable the child to benefit from special education, help children and families understand how feelings can trigger behaviors, and enable students to discover new ways of managing feelings and resulting behaviors. Mental health services are structured to meet the emotional needs of the child and work

in partnership with a behavior plan. Counselors, parents, and students develop measurable counseling goals and objectives cooperatively.

Positive behavior support: The program's positive behavior support system is based on the goal of teaching students to become contributing members of their communities. Students are encouraged through verbal reinforcement, tokens, points, and creative methods of individualizing rewards and interventions that are motivating to students. As students move through the system, they acquire more freedoms and more responsibilities.

Behavior support follows a level or step system. Each step has its own criteria and goals. This system, along with general rules and norms, is the basis for the classroom's social contract. The social contract is an agreement on the code of conduct for the classroom and explains how the class, as a whole, operates.

Although primary grades don't use the leveled system, all other grade levels do. The elementary grades have three levels, while middle and high school grades have five. These levels range from the most supportive (level 1) to the most independent (level 5), supporting gradual progress as students learn to manage behavior. At each level, students are expected to maintain behaviors from the previous level while also meeting new expectations. As students move through this system, they acquire increased opportunities.

The levels in the SCOE/LifeWorks Program provide a way to monitor student behavior and ensure that teachers maintain instructional control. Levels are based on behaviors that build toward a "successful independent student."

- Level 1: Working on boundaries
- Level 2: Learning self-regulation and compliance
- Level 3: Being a team player
- Level 4: Becoming self-managers
- Level 5: Acting as successful, independent students

Each student participates in a self-monitoring activity at the end of each work period. They record their behaviors (e.g., asked for help during lesson), while staff complete a similar monitoring form to verify the accuracy of the student's reporting. Comparison of the two ratings is the basis for promotion to the next level.

Daily communication regarding students' behavior enables students and families to internalize new and positive ways of interacting. Each day, students are provided with a point sheet, which also allows parents to review behaviors daily. The ultimate goal is to successfully return students to less restrictive placements, with a transition plan and appropriate supports in place so they can continue to be successful.

Positive behaviors are consistently reinforced throughout the school day. In addition to the level system, teachers incorporate at least two other positive reinforcement techniques into each day's program (e.g., mystery motivators, raffles, tickets to buy store items, etc.).

Behavior support plans: If a student has a behavior support or intervention plan in place prior to entering the SCOE/LifeWorks Program, it will be reviewed and revised for the new setting. Typically, behavior support plans generated in the general education setting are consistent with programmatic behavior support within SCOE/LifeWorks classrooms. Individual behavior support plans and behavior goals are also developed within the program if students are not progressing or when there are repeated occurrences of targeted behavior.

Behavior support plans are developed collaboratively by the classroom teacher, parent, school psychologist, LifeWorks counselor, and student, as appropriate.

*Examples of level privileges **

- Level 1: Student has access to some, but not all, areas of the campus and is supervised at all times.
- Level 2: Student has access to activities within the classroom and more access to free-time activities and social opportunities with peers.
- Level 3: Student has access to classes in the regular education setting.
- Level 4: Student has more integration opportunities.
- Level 5: Student is no longer on the point or level system.

** Note that a student's level is not the only factor in determining if a student will integrate into a general education class.*

Integration: One of the goals of the SCOE/LifeWorks Program is to provide students with the resources and skills to successfully function in the general education setting. Our teachers give students as many opportunities as possible to integrate into the general education environment. These integration opportunities may include lunch, recess, campus activities, or academic classes. Students are often referred to Special Day Class (SDC) classrooms because they have significant emotional and behavioral reactions that have impacted their ability to access curriculum in a general education setting.

A student's level is not the only factor in determining if a student will integrate into a general education class. Other factors may include student interest, emotional state (e.g., students with severe anxiety may choose to stay in the SDC), IEP team recommendations (which include parent input), individual goals and objectives, behavior support plan recommendations, and class availability. Typically, students progress on the SCOE/LifeWorks level system prior to integration, which is a way of ensuring that they will be able to

demonstrate appropriate behaviors (e.g., maintaining focus, positive peer interactions, asking for help).

It is not untypical for students in SCOE/LifeWorks classes to move up and down on the level system. This happens for a variety of reasons. While certain privileges are retracted with a level drop, the opportunity to attend general education classes is not necessarily removed. Attendance in these classes fosters self-esteem and helps build resilience in students, so continued enrollment is maintained whenever possible.

General discipline plan: A discipline plan is in place for those times when students are struggling and unable to follow the social contract of the classroom. The plan has three dimensions: prevention, action, and resolution.

- *Prevention:* Rules are designed and taught to help meet the needs of the entire class. The program maintains a basic set of rules that are posted and used consistently throughout all classrooms, elementary to high school. These rules are based on the Building Effective Schools Together (BEST) protocol: *follow directions the first time, be respectful, be responsible, be safe, and encourage others.*

Teachers appropriately enforce the rules and implement consequences when rules are broken, although specific consequences are not set for each rule violation. Teachers have the flexibility to apply individualized consequences for particular students under a philosophy that “fair is not always equal.” Students behave and react differently, so they are treated differently.

Consequences are not viewed as punishments, but are logical and usually involve doing correctly what was done wrong. Students are given an accurate, clearly stated, and specific description of what is likely to happen when a rule is broken. This preserves student dignity and allows students to make responsible decisions. Consequences may include “chills,” time out (which may include brief removal from the classroom for an extended time out), in-school supervision, and home suspension.

The social contract and classroom norms are taught regularly and teachers measure student understanding. The expectation is that students and staff understand the rules, which are embedded into the program and continuously discussed, modeled, and reinforced.

- *Action:* Teachers positively praise and reinforce appropriate social interactions. When a rule is broken, the teacher appropriately implements consequences. This is not an automatic response, but an opportunity to interact with students productively and create a teachable moment. The method of implementation is as important as the consequence.

- *Resolution:* This is the time to formulate positive action plans for students' behavior. During this interaction, teachers assess the situation to determine the function of the students' behavior, find out what is needed to prevent reoccurrence, work out a mutually agreeable plan, implement and monitor the plan, use creative approaches to implement the plan successfully, and access therapeutic supports and services. A SELPA Positive Behavior Support Plan is developed in cases of repeated incidents.

Referral procedures: Students are referred to the SCOE/LifeWorks Program by their district of residence. A district representative presents the case to the Interagency Consultation Committee (ICC), where placements are discussed and recommendations are made to the IEP team.

After referral forms are received, a classroom visit is scheduled, followed by an intake IEP meeting. This meeting is attended by the student and parent, SCOE administrator, and district representatives. Other participants might include the SCOE teacher, a SCMH or LifeWorks representative, and/or the child's classroom teacher. This meeting is designed to discuss placement options and program details, address concerns, and complete an intake IEP if appropriate.

For more information about the SCOE/LifeWorks Program, please contact:



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