

THE KEY TO

Academic Achievement, Career Success, and Lifelong Well-Being

Jeff Allmon, a school counselor at McPherson Middle School, understands the importance of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills. He has seen a lot of promising, college-bound students filter through the McPherson School District. They have great GPAs and test scores, are academically prepared for college, but drop out because they do not have strong SEL skills like grit, teamwork, resilience, or leadership. Developing these skills is paramount to Allmon, and that's why he uses ACT® Tessera® and the ACT Tessera Teacher Playbook to help him do so.

ACT Tessera is an online assessment which measures a student's SEL skills and character strengths. Allmon uses the results from the student's personalized report and actionable insights from the ACT Tessera Teacher Playbook as tools on which to base interventions and help students succeed.

The administration of the assessment is easy—entirely online and only taking 45 minutes—but Allmon believes the real weight is found with the Playbook. He calls it a **“phenomenal starting point”** for interventions. The ACT Tessera Teacher Playbook provides lesson plans for educators looking to integrate SEL into their intervention workshops and classrooms. Its curriculum and activities are designed to help students continue to develop their SEL strengths and improve upon their weaknesses.

“The Teacher Playbook is a great teaching tool. The lesson plans are really flexible and concrete—you're not locked into a particular plan or series. You pick and choose whatever you want.”

Jeff Allmon, school counselor at McPherson Middle School in McPherson, Kansas

Allmon will schedule his workshops for 30 minutes with five or six students who scored a one-star on a specific construct. Using the Playbook's curriculum, he will spend the first 15 minutes talking about the construct and lecturing. Then, for the last 15 minutes, he will choose one of the physical activities listed in the Playbook to help reinforce the lesson in a fun, engaging way.

One example is having his students practice looking at things from different people's perspective by placing twelve perspective pictures throughout the gym and having students walk around and try to see the different perspectives. Another favorite activity of Allmon's is working on team-building by asking students to arrange themselves without talking from shortest to tallest, or arrange themselves alphabetically by last or middle name.

"The kids love it," Allmon says. "There's a lot of fun and relatable activities for them to do. The kids have been asking, 'When are we going to get together again?' So I've been doing some lunch groups with them just because of the relationships built in those workshops."

Schoolwide reception of the assessment and its Playbook has been extremely positive, especially with teachers. Allmon says it is because they believe in the research and because he includes them in helping strengthen their students' SEL skills. In the morning before classes, students will meet in small groups with teachers, and Allmon will pick out an activity, along with objectives from the Playbook, for teachers to cover with their group.

All of the teachers have taken the assessment as well to see what their students are tested on. They love the five constructs tested—grit, teamwork, curiosity, resilience, and leadership—and Allmon has received 100% buy-in with Tessera. He claims, **"I don't think there's one person on our staff who's against it."**

Allmon puts a lot of focus on the Tessera report when it comes to defining and discussing a student's Individual Plan of Study (IPS). Every 8th and 12th grader in McPherson Middle and High School is required to have a meeting with a school counselor to discuss their IPS, and during a lot of these occasions, a parent will accompany them. By reviewing a student's academic and SEL profile side-by-side, then comparing it against their future goals, Allmon says **"both the student and parents come out feeling really confident about their progress and informed about all the options that might be available after high school."**

He illustrated one example where a student was thinking of pursuing a career in the medical field. In the meeting, Allmon talked about the SEL skills needed for a job in that area. The student had three stars in grit and three stars in resilience, which matched the skills needed in the profession she wanted to pursue. He then asked her if she agreed with the results on the report, and this prompt transformed into great conversation. She talked about how trauma earlier in her life played a large role in building her composure and her decision to pursue this specific career field.

"Having that really rich dialogue—that introspection exploration—I think is so important. And students do not feel talked down to. These aren't little kid kind of skills. They rise to that level."

Jeff Allmon

Another example he gave was a visit with a student and her mom. This student was in all advanced classes and had all 'A's, with only one grade dipping below one hundred percent, but gave herself a one-star in organization and responsibility. Allmon brought up the fact that "you cannot be at this level of success and not be organized and responsible." The mom said that the student was her own worst critic. Allmon then spent some time counseling the student on the importance of not being too hard yourself, which bolstered the student's self-esteem.

"Regardless if a student agrees with the scores or not, there's rich dialogue that can be happening. I think the saddest thing would be if a counselor looked at the data but didn't ever have a follow-up conversation with the students. That would be tragic and a huge waste of the assessment."

Jeff Allmon

It's vital to have multiple measures when assessing your students and ACT Tessera, along with its ACT Tessera Teacher Playbook, can help you look at the whole child. For more information about how you can administer ACT Tessera to your students, visit: act.org/act-tessera