

Describe the project and its proposed activities.

SPARK Gratitude is a research-based, CASEL-aligned gratitude initiative for elementary schools that focus on building appreciation, resilience, and connection. The components of SPARK include building gratitude awareness, implementing Gratitude Interventions (GI), increasing social-emotional skill-building, and growing understanding of the neurological aspects of an active gratitude practice related to health and well-being and supporting academic outcomes.

The proposed activities include:

- Announcements: a daily introduction to a gratitude-related concept based in neurology and social-emotional skill-building.
- Brain Spark Cards: Allowing students and teachers to connect and share gratitude the moment they feel it, increasing self-awareness and connection.
- Daily Activities: Each day has a highly engaging activity that focuses on different aspects of gratitude that align with SEL skill-building. Students will use cooperation, deductive reasoning, critical thinking, reflection, communication, movement, emotional regulation and constructive contribution in their daily activities.
- Daily Writing Reflection: Each daily activity has a reflective journal component to increase self-awareness, gratitude, intervention skill-building, and writing skills. Each journal allows students to connect and develop self-expression of appreciative feelings.
- Community Project: the entire community will work towards a community-wide project that demonstrates a commitment to understanding and growing gratitude.

What are the goals and objectives of the project?

As a school, we have been working on implementing social-emotional learning practices into learning and academics to assist with regulation, focus, understanding, and cognitive thought processes. We are looking to continue enhancing our social-emotional skills, critical thinking skills, reflective thought and self-awareness, and appreciation that support respectful interactions within the school community. We seek to increase student engagement with social-emotional skills by implementing this program. The goals outlined in this project included becoming more aware of how to connect with the feeling of gratitude (self-awareness and self-management), connecting with all aspects of gratitude (relationship skills, self-management, social awareness), and sharing gratitude (relationship skills, social awareness and responsible decision making).

Objectives include:

- Build an active practice of appreciation and gratitude
- Build resilience skills that help them bounce back from adversity more quickly
- Understand the brain benefits and neurological aspects of practicing gratitude
- Grow connected to their classroom and school as a whole
- Develop and boost self-awareness, social awareness, relationship building, responsible decision-making and self-management skills

What student(s) or student group(s) will participate and benefit from this project?

All students and staff would take part in and benefit from this project. Students and staff are equipped with the brain benefits of practicing gratitude and activities, and writing prompts to implement the program. Staff and students will also benefit from the community building and connectivity during and after the **SPARK** Gratitude program.

Describe how the project will enrich the educational experience of the target student population. Is this project instructionally innovative?

SPARK Gratitude has all the CASEL standards and objectives broken down for each activity, showing it to be a well-aligned social-emotional learning program. Statistics tell us that student stress levels are at an all-time high. Practicing gratitude helps brains and bodies manage and decrease stress, anxiety, and illness. This reduction can help wire brains to look for more gratitude and kindness in ourselves and others. The more we practice gratitude, the more we carve out the neurological “superhighway” of gratitude brain connections. This connection will actually help our students look for more thankful opportunities instead of negativity or problems.

Research shows that higher levels of gratitude predict: higher grade point average, life satisfaction, social integration, and acceptance, as well as lower envy and depression. (Froh, J.J., Emmons, R.A., Card, N.A., Bono, G., & Wilson, J.A. (2011). The activities, writing prompts, community projects, announcements, and brain spark cards create an engaging, integrative experience with multiple opportunities to understand and demonstrate gratitude, including integrating traditional academic modalities such as writing, student-led and focused activities, and collaborative practices. This program is flexible in implementation to fit multiple classroom populations.

Gratitude interventions like **SPARK** Gratitude can assist with developing social-emotional skills and brain-building skills and habits to support mental and physical well-being. Studies have shown that students in GI classes have improved well-being outcomes, mental health, social awareness and self-awareness (Bono G., Mangan S., Fauteux M., Sender J., 2020). Gratitude has also been shown to help increase focus and resilience (Wilson, J. T., 2016).

How does this project support the mission of the Education Foundation (to enhance extraordinary educational opportunities throughout the district) on behalf of the target student population?

Research has shown the benefits of gratitude and how it can positively impact student learning success, focus and resiliency. Not only will students be more aware of what they have to be grateful for, but our school culture will also benefit from the sense of connection and appreciation that comes from this gratitude intervention program.

Studies:

- Giacomo Bono, Susan Mangan, Michael Fauteux & Jason Sender (2020) A new approach to gratitude interventions in high schools that supports student wellbeing, The Journal of Positive

Psychology, 15:5, 657-665, [DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2020.1789712](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2020.1789712) Froh, J.J., Bono, G. & Emmons, R.

- Being grateful is beyond good manners: Gratitude and motivation to contribute to society among early adolescents. 34, 144–157 (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-010-9163-z> Wilson, J. T. (2016).
- Brightening the Mind: The Impact of Practicing Gratitude on Focus and Resilience in Learning. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 16(4), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v16i4.19998>
- Froh, Jeffrey J., Robert A Emmons, Noel A. Card, Giacomo Bono and Jennifer A. Wilson. “Gratitude and the Reduced Costs of Materialism in Adolescents.” *Journal of Happiness Studies* 12 (2011): 289-302. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Gratitude-and-the-Reduced-Costs-of-Materialism-in-Froh-Emmons/eb45e1e50341f559f44d214990cf37d6ab374059>

Videos:

- [Why we should teach gratitude in schools](#)
- [How learning gratitude is changing an Illinois middle school](#)
- [The science of gratitude](#)
- [Gratitude is good for you](#)