

The logo for the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at CSUN, featuring the letters 'CTL' in a large, bold, serif font.The text 'ON THE CUTTING EDGE' in a bold, serif font, centered within a black rectangular box.

Establishing Educational Relationships Through Empathy

by Megan Marcus and Steve Holle
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The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at the Michael D. Eisner College of Education (MDECOE) has been working with FuelEd to support CTL partner schools in the critical area of social emotional learning (SEL). Jones (2013) maintains that SEL competencies are concrete factors in the success of teachers, students and schools. Whereas many approaches to SEL focus on educator knowledge and behavior, FuelEd supports educators' personal transformation so they can develop secure relationships that drive optimal learning and development.

Megan Marcus founded FuelEd as a non-profit organization in 2012 with a mission to grow emotionally intelligent educators who build relationship-driven schools. In the summer of 2018, FuelEd led a full week of training for administration and faculty at Vaughn Next Century Learning Center, a CTL partner school. Sadie Edemann, Director of Elementary Instruction at Vaughn commented, "FuelEd helps you to see how relationships can be built to impact the culture of your school. It's a gift of time to reflect and grow in a way that I haven't experienced in any other professional development." Later that fall, CTL brought Megan to Nobel Middle School to conduct an empathy workshop with their faculty. Empathy has been recognized as a core component of social and emotional functioning (Malti, 2016). Marcus also presented as part of the *Education on the Edge* series at CSUN. On March 4, 2020, CTL hosted an introduction to FuelEd at CSUN. Faculty and CTL school partners engaged in the two-hour activity-driven session designed to explore how to leverage relationships, a skill largely missing from traditional teacher preparation. Dr. Mark Stevens, Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology & Counseling at CSUN shared, "The FuelEd program offered a non-judgmental and compassionate paradigm for teachers, of all levels, to better understand how students can influence their emotions and subsequent teaching style and enjoyment of the teaching process."

A growing body of research suggests that developing educators' social and emotional competencies, as FuelEd was founded to do, may produce a cascading effect on educator well-being by reducing stress and preventing burnout (CASEL, 2018). However, little research has explored the process of change at a granular level when educators receive interventions intended to support their long-term social and emotional growth, nor does the field have clear knowledge of the systemic conditions necessary in order to make educator social-emotional development a priority. Chang (2009) argues that more studies on the antecedent appraisals that teachers make are necessary to help teachers better understand how their emotions are triggered and then learn how to regulate those emotions.

The CSUN CTL is investigating how FuelEd may serve as a critical missing piece in educator preparation as it relates to the field of social-emotional learning. By connecting FuelEd with local schools, the CTL continues to support identified needs of our educational partners.

Megan Marcus is the CEO and Founder of FuelEd, an Ashoka Fellow, and expert on translating therapy to educational settings. Steve Holle has been with the Department of Elementary Education at CSUN for 20 years and is the Professional Development Coordinator for the CTL.

Fueled

The goal of Fueled's work is to empower teachers to become "secure attachment figures," the types of educators who build secure, caring relationships that can transform academic and developmental outcomes for students. According to Bergin and Bergin (2009), secure attachment is associated with higher grades and standardized test scores compared to insecure attachment. Secure attachment is also associated with greater emotional regulation, social competence, and willingness to take on challenges.

Ultimately, Fueled aims to build the field's understanding about what makes a great school and a great teacher. As Fueled gains greater insight through the research process into the contours of the problem it was founded to solve, as well as the critical ingredients of the solution, the organization intends to share this knowledge widely through various mediums such as white papers, blogs, podcasts, and academic articles. The resulting innovation of new products, resources, and tools as well as rich data with which to tell powerful stories of educator change and development will all contribute to the field's understanding of educator development and quality and provide clarity about the conditions required for long-term institutional shifts toward relationship-driven schools. The CSUN CTL is pleased to partner with Fueled around this mission.

Want to Learn More About Fueled?

www.fueledschools.org

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