

PAMELA BATOR

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT
OF DISTRICT ADVANCEMENT

To: Midge Connolly, Superintendent
From: Pamela Bator
Date: June 18, 2018
Re: Social and Emotional Learning in Weston

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a critical aspect of the work of educators today. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has issued support documents for reflection and implementation and the current Weston Strategic Plan includes students' well-being as one of the key strategic objectives. This memo is meant to serve as a starting point for defining SEL, to gather the SEL work that is currently in place, and to introduce some of the actions taken and about to be taken to deepen our SEL practice in the Weston Public Schools.

What is Social and Emotional Learning?

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), "Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (<https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>). DESE has partnered with CASEL to support educators and districts by providing guidelines on implementation and resources. In addition, the most recent English Language Arts and Mathematics frameworks updates include guiding principles that identify specific SEL-related practices. Most recently, DESE has shared supporting documents for linking SEL to culturally responsive teaching and learning.

What are Social and Emotional Learning Competencies?

CASEL's framework of "competencies" are best viewed in the following graphic:



(<https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>)

What are some of the approaches to SEL instruction?

In 2015, CASEL published a guiding document that outlined four different approaches to supporting social and emotional teaching and learning: specific, discrete lessons (e.g., how to label feelings; managing stress; conflict resolution); classroom/school practices (e.g., expectations; norms; structures); curriculum with embedded SEL (e.g., project-based learning/expeditionary learning; *Facing History and Ourselves*); and school-wide/district-wide initiatives. (<http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CASELBrief-WhatDoesSELLookLikeinPractice-11-1-15.pdf>)

What does this look like in Weston, now and moving forward?

It is important to recognize that SEL is not a program, but programs can support capacity-building and consistency of implementation.

Programs/Curricula

- Elementary: [Open Circle](#) (all classroom teachers are given training at Wellesley); [Responsive Classroom](#) (some have training, 30 educators will be trained this summer); [Social Thinking](#)
- Middle School: RALI: Relationships, Awareness, Learning, Integrity (Weston-developed)
- High School: [Restorative Practice](#) and Challenge Success

Practices

- District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP)
- Later start time (secondary)
- Advisories
- Affinity groups

- Lunch groups
- Data collection and analysis: Student Life Survey; Weston Youth Health Survey; SBIRT; Challenge Success Survey (Fall 2019)

Professional Development

- Responsive Classroom
- Challenge Success (District leaders last summer; High School team of administrators, faculty, parents, and students September 2018; all faculty, students, families School Year 2018-2019)
- Weston Professional Development Academy (WPDAC): Spring 2018 SEL course (to be repeated Fall 2018)

Community Engagement

- School-based coffees
- Family/Community speakers (2017-2018: Jessica Minihan, Sarah Ward, Rachel Poliner; 2018-2019: Challenge Success speaker)

Who supports this work?

All educators and school personnel are part of SEL: teachers, learning assistants, custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, administrators, etc.

In addition, there are professionals who will help as Weston Public Schools develops a more comprehensive and robust SEL continuum of experiences and supports.

- District-wide psychologist
- School-based adjustment counselors
- District-wide SEL team (2018-2019)