



## Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

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### How is the Legislature and The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Supporting Social Emotional Learning for Washington State schools?

The vision statement for The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) starts with, "The goal of Washington's public education system is to prepare every student who walks through our school doors for post-secondary aspirations, careers, and life. To do so, we must embrace an approach to education that encompasses the whole child..." (OSPI, 2017, p.1). Educating the whole child goes well beyond a single focus on academic instruction.

Educators are asking new questions about what schools need to teach: What is relevant to learning and teaching? Research continues to show that being aware of and managing emotions, setting and achieving positive goals, feeling and showing empathy for others, establishing and maintaining positive relationship, and making responsible decisions are all strong foundational conditions that students need for academic achievement (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak & Weissberg, 2017). These characteristics are broadly taught and supported as Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).

According to the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), schools can create supportive learning environments not only by providing direct SEL instruction but also by embedding SEL instruction and practice into existing academic classes (CASEL, n.d.). According to CASEL, students with a high level of social emotional skills:

- are more than twice as likely to stay in school;
- have fewer in-school suspensions;
- obtain higher grades in math and reading assessments;
- graduate with greater regularity.

In 2016, Washington was selected to participate in CASEL's Collaborating States Initiative where several states came together to learn from each other's SEL developmental experiences (CASEL, 2016).

Teacher preparation has largely focused on building and identifying appropriate curriculum and providing student focused instruction however, it has not always included the science behind how children learn. Social Emotional Learning is a vital aspect of this understanding. In January of 2018, The Aspen Institute created a report *How Learning Happens: Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Development*. This compelling research along with much of the research from CASEL and the American Institutes for Research continues to inspire the development of Washington's six SEL standards: Self Awareness, Self Management, Self Efficacy, Social Awareness, Social Management, and Social Engagement. These six standards create the foundation for Washington's SEL development.

Social Emotional Learning began development in Washington State during the 2015 legislative session. In the operating budget, ESSB 6052, Sec. 501, (34) the legislature directed OSPI to:

...convene a workgroup to recommend comprehensive benchmarks for developmentally appropriate interpersonal and decision-making knowledge and skills of social and emotional learning for grades kindergarten through high school that build upon what is being done in early learning [sic Early Learning Guidelines, 2012]. The workgroup shall submit recommendations to the education committees of the legislature, and the office of the governor by October 1, 2016 (p.135).

In October of 2016, the Workgroup created a report for the legislature making recommendations for SEL Standards and Benchmarks (Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup, 2016).

## Professional Development

In 2016, the Washington State Legislature continued their focus on SEL by authorizing and funding the development of a free on-line comprehensive module for professional development in SEL. The module is designed for educators, administrators, school staff, other professionals, and parents who interact with youth as a means to help them build and improve their understanding of social emotional skill development. The module contains five distinct learning segments.

1. Introduction to SEL.
2. Embedding SEL Schoolwide.
3. Creating a Professional Culture Based on SEL.
4. Integrating SEL into Culturally Responsive Classrooms.
5. Identifying and Selecting Evidence-Based Programs.

Although the online module can be completed by individuals, the learning is significantly more impactful if it is done collectively by those who will be implementing SEL. Throughout the online module, suggestions on ways in which to engage in the learning in a group setting are provided. The module can be accessed with a free Moodle account at <http://www.k12.wa.us/StudentSupport/SEL/OnlineModule.aspx>.

## Statewide Indicators Workgroup

During the 2017 session, the most recent legislation for SEL was passed. In the Operational Budget, ESSB 5883 Sec, 501 (31) it directed OSPI to:

...convene a workgroup to build upon the work of the 2015 SEL Benchmarks Workgroup. The new work group must identify and articulate developmental indicators for each grade level for each of the social emotional learning benchmarks, solicit feedback from stakeholders, and develop a model of best practices or guidance for schools on implementing the benchmarks and indicators. The workgroup will submit recommendations to the education committees of the legislature, and the office of the Governor by June 30, 2019 (OSPI, 2018, p.1).

This Statewide workgroup consists of representatives from 25 various agencies and meets monthly. The Workgroup has committed to developing Indicators that are developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and trauma informed. For more information about the Statewide Indicators Workgroup and to see the list of current members, please go to <http://www.k12.wa.us/WorkGroups/SELB.aspx>.

## Trauma Informed Practices

Understanding the impact of trauma on the lives of students is essential for teaching. Adversity and trauma can impact a student's behavior and their ability to learn, sometimes to the extreme. The free downloadable book, *The Heart of Learning and Teaching: Compassion, Resiliency, and Academic Success (2016)*, written by OSPI and Western Washington University staff has been a widely used resource for educators and other practitioners seeking additional information on the impact of trauma on behavior and learning. Many educators, through their teacher preparation studies, are often not well equipped to respond to extreme behavior that can be brought on by trauma in a student's life. A trauma informed SEL approach promotes an infrastructure in schools that:

- Raises awareness of the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences and toxic stress.
- Creates a context for sustainable response and change in the school environment.
- Builds strategies that support wellbeing and learning for all students.
- Moves teaching toward being more rewarding and effective.
- Informs relevant policy development that affect school climate and culture.
- Utilizes Multi-Tiered Systems of Support as an organizing framework to efficiently and effectively deploy curriculum, instructional practices, and resources.
- Individualize and provide intensive supports in addition to core curricula.

A culture and climate established on well-founded SEL based principles is essential for trauma-impacted students to thrive. For many of them, thriving comes from well-defined environmental and instructional conditions for learning and the perception of their own safety, which are tenants of an SEL inspired environment. Overall, it can be far more important than academic content and instruction.

### Conclusion

Implementing SEL effectively and equitably in schools is challenging and rewarding. A comprehensive plan for serving students is necessary. Recommend steps include:

1. Start by evaluating and building school and classroom environments that are conducive to learning, and social and emotional development.
2. Incorporate principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) when adapting SEL curricula to their unique climate.
3. Emphasize equity in the selection and implementation of curriculum.
4. Take a holistic approach, understanding that each person (child and adult) will start at different places and progress in different ways along an SEL continuum.

SEL is foundational for both life and learning. By providing culturally responsive and trauma informed guidance for the application of SEL curricula as well as implementation strategies, OPSI intends to provide a platform of resources schools can utilize to support social emotional development for all students and staff within their school or district.

Further information about the development of SEL in Washington State can be found at <http://www.k12.wa.us/StudentSupport/SEL/default.aspx>.

### References

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