



Washington State ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development)

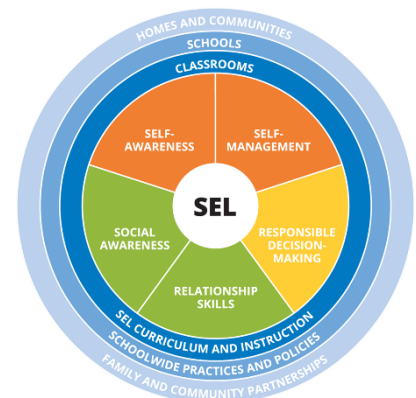
“The Practitioner’s Best Friend”

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How can we align social emotional learning, in and out of school, to best support the Whole Child?

Tacoma believes that everyone deserves to be healthy, safe, engaged, challenged, and supported. For these conditions to exist, it is our responsibility to create a system that embraces what we call the Whole Child Pillars: Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, Physical and Mental Wellness, Trauma Sensitive Practices, Restorative Practices, Advanced Tiers, Signature Whole Child Practices, and Continuous Improvement. Each pillar directly supports the district’s strategic plan, is interrelated, interdependent, and critical in supporting staff and students. This article aims to introduce you to our SEL pillar and how we have co-created an in and out of school time SEL system to better support every student (and adult), every day.

SEL happens over the course of a day, a lifetime, and in every setting in which students and adults spend their time. Every environment provides support for each person’s social emotional (SE) development. Effectively supporting SE development in schools requires collaboration among families and communities. It also involves building adult capacity to support a school climate and culture that recognizes, respects, and supports differences in abilities, experiences, and ethnic and cultural differences, and celebrates diversity. Rooted in this foundational understanding, Tacoma Public Schools (TPS) is developing a comprehensive aligned SEL system to support students during the school day and when they move into extended learning opportunities (ELO) with our community partners.

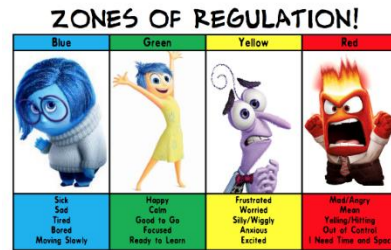


Through the last few years, schools and ELO providers have worked together to architect a plan for fostering environments that help students build SE skills, such as how to manage emotions, show empathy, maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions. We know that the process through which SEL occurs goes far beyond an explicit skill instruction lesson. It is a systematic approach for intentionally cultivating a caring, participatory, and equitable learning environment through evidence-based practices involving all students. Therefore, a sound SEL system should include direct skill instruction, integration across settings and content areas, and climate and culture.

Climate and culture can be one of the most challenging areas to tackle, so Tacoma has heavily invested their time and commitment in their unifying thread “Signature Whole Child Practices:” Warm Welcomes, Emotions Checks and Community Circles. All adults who work with students, in and out of school, have been trained on these practices, ensuring that no matter where a student is, they have consistent reliable language and practices.

The first Signature Practice is Warm Welcomes, where all staff greet youth with enthusiasm, warmth, and care at the start of a session. Not to be confused with active supervision, this is an opportunity to build relationships and engage with everyone in a non-academic conversation. Our goal is for students to be warmly acknowledged when they hop on the bus in the morning, when they walk into school and their classroom and as they enter the after-school space. This is one powerful way to build relationships and promote a sense of welcoming, acceptance, and belonging.

Our second Signature Practice, Emotion Checks, builds self-awareness, as adults provide a common language and safe structured opportunities for youth to identify and communicate their emotions. The Emotion Check-In strategy is grounded in the Zones of Regulation® framework for helping young people develop self-awareness and self-regulation of emotions. Ultimately, this strategy involves creating intentional opportunities for youth to identify, name, or describe their emotions.



The final Signature Practice is group circles. To build social awareness, adults provide structured and inclusive opportunities for both youth and adults to get to know each other. Relationship-building opportunities establish inclusive practices where youth can share their culture, perspectives, and background. Youth learn to recognize, respect, and appreciate differences within their community members. As we say in Tacoma, the relationship IS the intervention!

As part of Tacoma’s comprehensive SEL system, Tacoma has adopted Getting Along Together as their elementary explicit instruction SEL curriculum. In addition to the Signature Practices, each school has dedicated time on their master schedules to teach the weekly lessons. Following the cycle of effective instruction, Getting Along Together addresses: thinking and cognitive skills, emotional management, as well as interpersonal and social skills. Collectively, these skills and strategies create a peaceful school environment where students are empowered to manage their own behavior, decrease conflict, and increase receptivity to learning.

GAT2 Goals

GAT2 aims to...	by....
improve learning	teaching skills, such as focusing attention and managing emotions.
foster engaged learners	providing tools to create a positive climate.
build students' ability to solve problems and face challenges	using routines and activities that build cognitive, social, and emotional skills.
increase students' social and behavioral outcomes	teaching strategies for building relationships, making good decisions, and maintaining good mental health.

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While all of these practices are helpful for students throughout their SEL journey, we also know that to implement these practices successfully, adults must strengthen their own SE skills. In order to model and encourage positive student interactions, adults need the same SE to communicate effectively with students and to handle stressful situations that can occur in classrooms (Brackett et al., 2009). Teachers who are SE competent, develop supportive relationships with students, create activities that build on the strengths of students, and help students develop the basic social and emotional skills necessary to participate in classrooms (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Furthermore, Tacoma believes that development is not linear. Practice is dependent on context, culture, and experiences; therefore, Tacoma’s Signature Whole Child Practices have become a cornerstone practice throughout district and building meetings.

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