Addressing Social and Emotional Learning in Washington’s K-12 Public Schools

Report by the Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks (SELB) Workgroup

2016

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# Authorizing Legislation

$161,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2016 and $54,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2017 are provided solely for the superintendent of public instruction 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. The workgroup shall submit recommendations to the education committees of the legislature, and the office of the governor by October 1, 2016

# xxxIntroduction

Authorized by ESSB 6052 Sec 501 (34), the Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup (SELB) is comprised of statewide experts who have experiences working with youth, education, and social emotional learning. To the greatest extent possible, the members of the workgroup were selected to reflect the cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, and geographic diversity of Washington state. Members met monthly from October, 2015 through September, 2016 to develop recommendations for comprehensive benchmarks around developmentally appropriate interpersonal and decision-making knowledge and skills of social and emotion learning for grades kindergarten through high school that build upon what is being done in early learning.

This report is a culmination of the work completed by the workgroup, including final recommendations, the background of Social Emotional Learning, the workgroup’s process, and finally, the completed product of standards, benchmarks, and indicators for K-12 students in Washington state.

# Overview: What is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Why is it Important?

Social and Emotional Learning is the process of acquiring and applying skills to help kids and adults manage their emotions, become more self-aware, build social skills, form good relationships, and make positive decisions. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which students:

* Develop awareness and management of their emotions
* Set and achieve important personal and academic goals
* Use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships
* Demonstrate decision making and responsible behaviors to achieve school and life success.
* Understand they exist in communities and contribute to community well-being

There is a strong research base that shows SEL can have a positive impact on school climate, promote a host of academic benefits, and help students become productive and positive citizens. Educators and schools can help students develop social and emotional competencies by intentionally teaching these skills and by implementing specific instructional and classroom-management practices.

Over the past decade, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has increased popularity around the country as many states begin to develop and adopt SEL standards. There is a growing awareness in Washington and in the U.S. among educators and policymakers about the importance of social and emotional development for successful student performance in school. Research indicates large numbers of WA children are contending with significant social, emotional, and mental health barriers to their success in school and life. The ability to recognize and manage emotions and establish and maintain positive relationships impacts both readiness to learn and the ability to benefit from learning opportunities.

Significant progress has been made in the United States in establishing SEL as a component of education policy. On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). There are several elements of this new law that support social and emotional learning. ESSA allows more flexibility for states and local school districts to define and assess student success. One example is in Title IV, LEAs who receives allocations under section 4105 are required to implement comprehensive programs that “foster safe, healthy, supportive, and drug free environments that support student academic achievement” including programs that “support a healthy, active life style”, “help prevent bullying and harassment”, and “establish learning environments and enhance students’ effective learning skills that are essential for school readiness and academic success such as by providing integrated systems of student and family supports” (Every Student Succeeds Act, Sec. 4108 (2)(ii)(iii)(viii), 2015).

In Washington state, the legislature intends “to continue to strengthen and modify the structure of the entire K-12 educational system, including nonbasic education programmatic elements, in order to build the capacity to anticipate and support potential future enhancements to basic education as the educational needs of our citizens continue to evolve” ([RCW 28A.150.198](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28A.150.198)). In 2012, the Department of Early Learning, Thrive by Five Washington, and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction issued the Early Learning and Development Guidelines from birth through third grade. The guidelines discuss child development at different stages from birth through age 8 in a ways that is culturally inclusive. In 2015, the Washington State Legislature directed the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (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 (Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6052 Sec 501 (34)).

“In addition to content knowledge and academic skills, students must develop sets of behaviors, skills, attitudes, and strategies that are crucial to academic performance in their classes, but that may not be reflected in their scores on cognitive tests.” (Farrington et al., 2012)

# The Need for Student Development of SEL

Social emotional learning requires a shift in the climate and culture within the education system and a deep and equitable engagement with each student. Development and implementation of social emotional learning within a school provides an opportunity for a deep examination of the assumptions about a student’s strengths and capacity to learn, and the relationships within schools, especially across diverse backgrounds. In the last decade, increasing emphasis has been placed on understanding the many ways that social, emotional, and mental well-being affects learning and child/youth preparedness. Prior to entering school, children experience varying levels of exposure to social settings.

In recent years, there has been a focus in education on attributes other than cognitive ability (Heckman & Kautz, 2014a). Noncognitive qualities can include goal-directed efforts (e.g., grit, self-control, growth mind-set), healthy social relationships (e.g., gratitude, emotional intelligence, social belonging), and sound judgement and decision making (e.g, curiosity, open-mindedness). Longitudinal research confirms that such qualities can predict academic, economic, social, psychological, and physical well-being (Almlund, Duckworth, Heckman, & Kautz, 2011; Borghans, Duckworth, Heckman, & ter Weel, 2008; Farrington et al., 2012; J. Jackson, Connolly, Garrison, Levin, & Connolly, 2015; Moffitt et al., 2011; Naemi et al., 2012; Yeager & Walton, 2011).

Developing statewide policies are often instrumental in initiating the development of standards for SEL. Illinois became the first state to adopt policies that led to the development of state standards for social and emotional learning in 2004. Since then, several other states have adopted similar policies or are currently considering and developing such policies (CASEL, 2016).

# Research around SEL

Research demonstrates that students who participate in SEL programs benefit in a range of areas. Durlak et al. (2011) found that participation in SEL programs have been associated with positive impacts on six major student outcomes, including: improved SEL skills, attitudes toward self and others, social behavior, academic performance, as well as reduced conduct problems and emotional distress.

# Stakeholder Engagement

The Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks (SELB) Workgroup developed a stakeholder engagement and feedback plan that included a variety of methods for gathering community and stakeholder feedback on their draft benchmarks and recommendations. The workgroup identified stakeholder groups to be those which represent key components of the educational system and/or consumers of public education, such as teachers and paraeducators, parents, students, district administrators, principals, education board members, other school personnel, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and other groups with a vested interest.

In order to fully and properly receive feedback from stakeholders, the Workgroup utilized 1) multiple focus groups, 2) an online feedback form, 3) a bias and sensitivity review, and 4) a community forum. Feedback provided by stakeholders on the workgroup’s draft K-12 Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks for Washington state was used to help guide the workgroups recommendations to the Legislature.

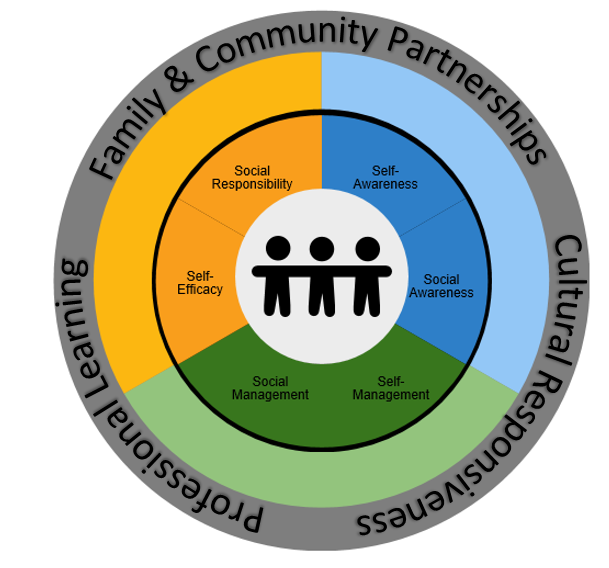
# Recommendations

Introduction introductory text about the recommendations.

## Benchmarks

The Workgroup recommends the Legislature, with the guidance and support of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, adopt the proposed Social and Emotional Learning Benchmarks for K-12 students in Washington state. Members discussed in depth, the importance of providing statewide benchmarks to align Social and Emotional Learning across all districts in our state.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| These benchmarks **are** | These benchmarks **are not** |
| * Intended to elevate the importance of positive skill development for all children and to indicate areas for growth and development. * Intended to be cultural responsive to the unique backgrounds of our students. | * Intended to be a way to stigmatize, marginalize or exclude students in schools. * Intended to elevate any single cultural value. |



These Standards, Benchmarks, and Indicators are designed to build upon the Foundational Components of **Family/Community Partnerships**, **Cultural Responsiveness**, and **Professional Learning**. When considering the standards and their implementation, the Workgroup highly recommends aligning the standards with the foundational components. Doing so will foster deeper connections between schools and families, schools and community partners, and teachers with their students, as well as helping to ensure meaningful cultural sensitivity, and more avenues for professional learning.

## Professional Learning

Recommendation. In education, the term professional development may be used in reference to any training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, staff, and educators improve their knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). When responding to behavioral and emotional needs, it is critical that educators and administers build a level of mutual understanding about mission, structure, vocabulary, and capacity (OSPI, 2008). In order to foster social and emotional skills in childhood, professionals working in the K-12 education system must receive the training necessary to implement this type of learning in the classroom. Text (include modules)

## Family/Community Partnerships

Recommendation. Engagement of families in their child’s learning is associated with increased achievement and academic performance, improved self-regulation, fewer discipline problems, stronger homework and study habits, improved work orientation, more positive attitudes toward school, and higher educational aspirations (e.g., Fan & Chen, 2001; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). In the context of supporting the development of SEL competencies, families play a critical role. They help children to develop and practice them in contexts that are culturally and linguistically sensitive and relevant for the child. As students learn social-emotional skills, they need opportunities to practice and apply the skills in actual situations and be recognized for using these skills across a variety of settings, including home (Bond & Hauf, 2004; Hawkins et al., 2004; Nation et al., 2003; Weare & Nind, 2011). Two-way communication with families and community partners about the importance of SEL, including ways in which it can be supported at home and in the community is essential to encouraging SEL development in students.

## Cultural Responsiveness

Recommendation. Culture is central to student growth and learning. Culturally responsive education recognizes, respects and uses student identities and backgrounds to create optimal learning. Teaching methods that use references to a student’s culture help the student understand mainstream culture through a lens of recognition and acknowledgement. The link between culture and classroom instruction derives from evidence that cultural practices shape thinking processes. A culturally responsive education addresses attitudes, environment, curriculum, teaching strategies and family/community involvement. Applying benchmarks in a culturally responsive manner is the foundation for success.

“As a matter of basic equity, districtwide SEL must be present at all school sites. Because it is not feasible to implement SEL at all grades and schools simultaneously, district leaders must develop a phased-in implementation. They must ensure the phased-in implementation model doesn’t become simply a pilot in which interested schools volunteer or low-performing schools are required to participate. A multiyear phase-in plan should be made public and the timeline adhered to so that all schools are engaged within a reasonable amount of time, typically two to five years.”

– CASEL, Sustaining Districtwide Social and Emotional Learning: Lessons from the SEL Financial Sustainability Project

## Staffing and Implementation

Recommendation. SEL is complex in the way that it is interwoven throughout all grades, content areas, and across all school staff. Successful implementation will require all of the sub items included in this report including professional learning, cultural responsiveness and family/community partnerships and consideration of a differentiated System of Supports that meets the needs of all students.

## Differentiated System of Supports

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) should be viewed as a continuum for all students and is not designed to be measured by age or grade. There are certain circumstances that may affect where a child or adult is at on this spectrum. Some of these circumstances include physical or emotional neglect, loss of a parent, complex trauma, vicarious (secondary) trauma and toxic stress. Additionally, the stress and anxiety associated with academic demands and school experiences may affect a student’s social emotional learning. These circumstances can be a onetime event or a chronic, ongoing reality. All children and adults handle trauma and adversity differently, and students can express different forms of emotional distress after experiencing stressors through different forms of internalizing or externalizing behaviors.

### ACES & Trauma

text

### Setting

text

### Response to Intervention (RTI)

text

### Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

text

### Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS)

text

# Conclusion

In examining this work, please take great care in reflecting on the complexity of human development. Educators must seek opportunities to optimize and solidify a student's current personal, academic, and cultural strengths and abilities, while providing more opportunities to enhance and grow skills of the lifelong learner and community member. Working collaboratively with families and communities to identify when and where a student can or cannot access their social and emotional skills will provide valuable feedback on how best to meet a student’s needs.

Insert Summary of Recommendations

# Resources

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