



POLICY BRIEF: SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

June 2017

GOAL: Adopt strong policies and secure the resources needed to incorporate social emotional learning into school settings with the goal of improving students' ability to develop skills for greater self-awareness and to manage their emotions and interpersonal relationships in order to achieve school, career, and life success.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Children are generally expected to learn to manage their emotions, work well with others from diverse backgrounds, and feel connected to their school and peers. A gap in development in these areas can negatively impact a child's academic performance, behavior, and health.¹ Schools can serve as an important setting for children to not only gain academic knowledge, but also the skills needed to manage emotions and relationships with other children and adults. Social emotional learning (SEL) provides an effective framework for learning such skills in a positive manner. SEL is broadly understood as a process through which people build awareness and skills for managing emotions, setting goals, establishing relationships, and making responsible decisions that support success in school and in life.²

Though there is extensive research showing SEL has positive short- and long-term impacts on a student, it has not been consistently and adequately incorporated into the education system in Washington State. As the state struggles to resolve many significant issues relating to education, including a [state supreme court ruling](#) relating to funding for basic education, it is important that priorities not be limited to traditional academic outcomes. Instead the state needs to look at the whole student, including their social and emotional development. In addition, while it is a good first step to acknowledge the importance of social emotional learning, there also needs to be a statewide framework to ensure consistency in SEL throughout the state, a requirement that all schools implement SEL so that whether a student gets access to SEL is not determined by which school they go to, and finally, sufficient resources are needed to successfully implement and support these programs.

VALUES STATEMENT

Emotions play a significant role in how a child approaches learning, development, and interpersonal relationships. As a child grows, if they have not developed the skills needed to manage those emotions they may begin down a path of feeling disconnected from school, teachers, family, and peers, which can lead to social, education, and conduct issues. Incorporating social emotional learning into a student's education experience equips them with

¹ January 2011, Child Development. *The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions*. <http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/meta-analysis-child-development-1.pdf>

² Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). *What Is SEL?* <http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel/>

the skills needed to better manage their own cognitive, physical, and emotional development. A meta-analysis³ of 213 studies involving over 270,000 students showed that those who participated in SEL programs showed numerous positive outcomes, including:

- An 11% gain in academic achievement compared to students who did not participate in such programs;
- Increased prosocial behaviors such as kindness, sharing, and empathy;
- Improved overall attitudes toward school, themselves, and others;
- Reduced depression and stress;
- Prevention of specific behavioral problem such as substance use, interpersonal violence, bullying, and school failure.

In addition, a 2015 report by the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution showed SEL skills are critical for the long-term success of all students in today's economy, including reducing lifetime potential for poverty and increasing economic mobility.⁴

With this growing body of research showing the many positive outcomes of social emotional learning, it is apparent that incorporating SEL into the academic environment is not only important for improving academic outcomes, but also for the broader prevention of physical and behavioral health issues. It is this broader impact that makes incorporating SEL into the school setting an important prevention strategy that should be advocated for in Washington State.

BACKGROUND ON SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN WASHINGTON

There are many different systems and environments that social emotional learning can and should be incorporated into, but there is broad agreement that places of education and learning are among the most effective environments. As the research emerges showing the importance of social emotional learning, a growing number of schools, districts, early learning programs, and states have been looking to find ways to incorporate a framework for SEL into both early childhood and K-12 education standards.

Varying progress has been made in Washington State in incorporating SEL into these two systems. The early learning system in Washington has been ahead of the K-12 system in incorporating SEL into their recommendations, guidelines, and strategic planning. This is somewhat unsurprising given the fairly common whole-child approach in early learning while K-12 continues to hold an emphasis on traditional academic knowledge. In fact, all 50 states have incorporated SEL into their early learning standards in some manner.⁵ However, incorporating SEL into both systems is critical for best equipping a child with the social emotional tools that help put them on a path to success.

³ January 2011, Child Development. *The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions*. <http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/meta-analysis-child-development-1.pdf>

⁴ 2015, The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research and the Brookings Institution. *Opportunity, Responsibility, and Security: A Consensus Plan for Reducing Poverty and Restoring the American Dream*. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Full-Report.pdf>

⁵ Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). *Policy At the State Level*. <http://www.casel.org/policy/>

SEL & Early Learning in Washington

In their 10-year strategic plan⁶ to develop a comprehensive framework for building the early childhood system in Washington, the Department of Early Learning explicitly included social emotional learning under three of their strategies for ensuring school readiness for all children in Washington:

- Strategy #16, ‘*Ensure Social-Emotional Learning – Parents, Caregivers, Early Learning Professionals*’, involves providing opportunities to deepen understanding of social and emotional development and skills;
- Strategy #25, ‘*Provide Health, Mental Health and Social-Emotional Consultation in Early Learning Settings*’, involves providing coordinated local-state consultation to early learning providers.
- Strategy #26, ‘*Ensure Continuum of Social-Emotional Learning – Children*’, involves making available a continuum of skills development and support to every child in pre-K12 school classes.

In addition to including social emotional learning in their 10-year strategic plan, the Department of Early Learning, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and Thrive Washington worked together to develop the *Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines: Birth through 3rd Grade*.⁷ These guidelines include information about social emotional development for parents, teachers, and other adults to support children. While the *Guidelines* are not limited exclusively to social emotional learning and development, they do provide a tool about children’s development that includes many important aspects of SEL.

The Department of Early Learning reported that in the 2013-14 school year, the year following the release of the *Guidelines*, the social emotional development of nearly 50% of children in the early learning childhood and assistance program improved.⁸

SEL & the K-12 Education System in Washington State

In recent years, Washington has started to focus on incorporating SEL into the K-12 school system. Washington is among 11 states (CT, ID, IL, KS, MA, ME, OH, PA, VT, WA and WV) that have done some level of work in setting goals with developmental benchmarks for social emotional learning at the elementary school level.⁹ In 2015, the Washington legislature directed the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) via budget proviso 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

⁶ September 2010, Department of Early Learning. *Washington State Early Learning Plan*. <https://del-public-files.s3.amazonaws.com/PublicationDocs/ordering-DEL/ELP.pdf>

⁷ 2012, Department of Early Learning, *Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines: Birth through 3rd Grade*. <https://del.wa.gov/sites/default/files/imported/publications/development/docs/guidelines.pdf>

⁸ 2017. Washington State Legislature *HB 1518: Improving student achievement by promoting social emotional learning throughout the calendar year*. <http://lawfilesexet.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2017-18/Pdf/Bills/House%20Bills/1518-S.pdf>

⁹ April 2017, PennState & Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. *Social Emotional Learning in Elementary School: Preparation for Success*. http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2017/rwjf436221

early learning.”¹⁰ From this directive, the Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup was formed and met regularly to start developing a framework with guiding principles, standards, and benchmarks for establishing effective SEL programs in Washington. The workgroup was comprised of experts from across the state with experiences working with youth and families in educational settings, and knowledge of topics relating to SEL. In October 2016 the workgroup produced a [report](#) to the legislature with the framework and also recommendations on next steps for the legislature.

The framework developed by the workgroup includes guiding principles, a set of six standards using a two-part structure that highlights the need to develop awareness and understanding of both self and social competencies, and benchmarks for each standard that can be used as a reference point to identify student progress and areas of need. See *Appendix A* for a comprehensive overview of the guiding principles, standards, and benchmarks.

In their report, the Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup made two recommendations to the legislature:

1. Adopt the proposed Social Emotional Learning Framework, including the guiding principles, standards, and benchmarks for K-12 students in Washington.
2. Continue to fund the Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup (SELB) as a state-level advisory committee.

EXISTING EFFORTS

Following the report from the Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup, there were several different approaches to advance social emotional learning during the 2017 legislative session. There were three primary pieces of legislation and also a budget proviso in the House-proposed operating budget that all sought to continue the state’s work on SEL by either adopting a framework for SEL in schools, continuing the work of the SEL Benchmarks Workgroup, expanding access to SEL throughout the year, or providing funding for staffing to promote social emotional learning.

Continuing the Work of the SEL Benchmarks Workgroup

Legislation was introduced in the 2017 session to extend the duration of the Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup for two more years (until June 30, 2019) to complete additional work. [SB 5714](#) would have had OSPI continue to convene the workgroup and required them to develop the following:

1. Indicators to provide concrete examples of what it might look like when a student meets a social emotional learning benchmark; and
2. Resources to support schools and school districts with implementing social and emotional learning.

¹⁰ 2015-17 WA State Operating Budget, ESSB 6052 Sec 501 (34). <http://leap.leg.wa.gov/leap/budget/lbns/1517Omni6052-S.SL.pdf>

The workgroup would have been required to provide reports to the legislature by June 30, 2018 and June 30, 2019 that summarize their accomplishments, measure their progress, and include additional recommendations regarding SEL. [SB 5714](#) was introduced and referred to the Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education committee but was never scheduled for a hearing.

Continuation of the workgroup was also included in [HB 1518](#). Under this legislation the workgroup was directed to do take on various bodies of work including (among other things): identifying and articulating developmental indicators for each grade level for each of the SEL benchmarks, soliciting feedback from stakeholders, developing a model of best practices or guidance from schools on implementing the benchmarks and indicators, and creating a state implementation plan that provides a framework for incorporating and aligning SEL with other education initiatives. [HB 1518](#) also included other approaches to incorporating SEL as described in the following section of this brief.

In addition to the above proposed legislation, the House included funding in their proposed operating budget for the workgroup to continue for two more years. For the 2017-19 biennium, \$200,000 was proposed to be provided solely for OSPI to convene the workgroup to build upon their previous work. In addition to the existing workgroup members, the proviso required five representatives of diverse communities to be included. The proposed proviso included some, though not all, of the same language from section 3 of [HB 1518](#). Under the proviso, the workgroup would be required to submit recommendations to the legislature by June 30, 2019.¹¹ As of the writing of this brief the legislature has not yet finalized a budget for the 2017-19 biennium, so it is unknown if this funding and proviso language will ultimately be included in the final 2017-19 operating budget passed by the legislature.

Expanding Access to SEL Throughout the Year

[HB 1518](#), also known as the ‘Summer Step Up Act’, was introduced in the 2017 session with a goal of improving student achievement by promoting social emotional learning throughout the calendar year. Amongst other things, the bill would have done this by:

1. Adding 600 slots to summer ECEAP programs at K-12 school building sites throughout the state;
2. Identifying developmental indicators for every grade level, K-12, for each of the six benchmarks from the SEL Benchmarks Workgroup report;
3. Requiring OSPI to employ a social emotional learning technical advisor to assist and advise schools in implementing SEL programs throughout the year; and
4. Providing summer step-up grants to increase the number of summer learning programs that combine academics and SEL.

After being introduced, [HB 1518](#) was referred to the House Education Committee where a public hearing was held on February 13th. The bill was amended and passed out of that

¹¹ 2017-19 House Proposed WA State Operating Budget (March 31, 2017), ESSB 5048 Sec 501 (31).
http://leap.leg.wa.gov/leap/Budget/Detail/2017/hoStrikingAmendment_0331.pdf

committee with a vote of 13-1. The bill was referred to the House Appropriations Committee but had no future activity beyond that, so did not pass during the 2017 session.

Increased Funding for Staffing

Another piece of legislation relating to SEL introduced during the 2017 session was [HB 1621](#), which sought to promote children’s health and social emotional learning by providing funding to school districts to employ additional staff who are dedicated to supporting children’s health and social emotional learning. Specifically, the bill would have increased funding allocations for each level of prototypical school by one full-time equivalent certificated instructional staff until class size reduction under [Initiative 1351](#) is fully implemented. In addition, HB 1621 would have required school districts to use the new allocation only for staff who support children’s health and social emotional learning. Such staff are specified in the bill as school nurses, social workers, psychologists, guidance counselors, and parent involvement coordinators.

[HB 1621](#) was introduced and referred to the House Appropriations Committee where a public hearing was held on February 15th. The bill had no future activity so did not pass during the 2017 session.

POTENTIAL PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Prevention strategies relating to social emotional learning should focus on three main approaches:

1. Extending the work of the SEL Benchmarks Workgroup to continue to do develop the SEL framework, establish formal guidelines, develop best practices, and create a state implementation plan.
2. Have the framework recommended by the SEL Benchmarks Workgroup formally adopted by the State and require that framework to be implemented at schools statewide.
3. Securing the funding needed for SEL to be consistently and adequately incorporated into both the early learning and K-12 education systems statewide.

While all three of these strategies are important, the SEL framework and formal guidelines should be adopted as an initial step to ensure the staff implementing SEL throughout the state have the appropriate tools needed to implement quality and consistent SEL programs.

Having SEL incorporated in early learning and K-12 education systems in Washington State will help provide children the tools and knowledge they need to manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.¹² The long-term outcomes of this will help equip children to better achieve school, career, and life success.

¹² Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). *What Is SEL?* <http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel/>

RESOURCES

[Addressing Social Emotional Learning in Washington’s K-12 Public Schools](#) (2016) – Report by the Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup

[CASEL Program Guides: Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs](#) – Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

[WA State Early Learning and Development Guidelines: Birth Through 3rd Grade](#) (2012) – Department of Early Learning, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Thrive WA

[Social Emotional Learning in Elementary School: Preparation for Success](#) (2017) – Penn State & Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

[The Impact of Enhancing Students’ Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions](#) (2011) – Durlak, et al.

This publication was supported by National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention under award number NU58DP004830.

The content of this publication is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For more information please contact:

Julie Peterson | Senior Director of Policy | Foundation for Healthy Generations | juliep@healthygen.org

Appendix A – Guiding Principles, Standards, and Benchmarks from the Washington Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup

Source: *Addressing Social Emotional Learning in Washington’s K-12 Schools*

Report by the Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup

October 1, 2016

<http://www.k12.wa.us/Workgroups/SELB-Meetings/SELBWorkgroup2016Report.pdf>

Guiding Principles:

Professional Learning:

In order to implement SEL into the classroom and foster social emotional skills, professionals working in the K-12 education system must receive ongoing, job-embedded professional learning. As with any statewide learning standard, it is essential administrators and educators build a shared understanding, vocabulary, and vision before implementation.

School/Family/Community Partnerships:

Two-way respectful and collaborative communication between schools, families, and community partners is essential to the development of effective, culturally responsive SEL supports in school. These communications should include the value of SEL in schools, how students demonstrate their social emotional skills in different settings, and effective ways to teach and reinforce these skills both in school and in their homes. Families also provide vital insights that can help identify where educators can support students and how students develop and express their interpersonal and intrapersonal assets across settings. As school communities work collaboratively, educators will be better able to effectively support the SEL development of each child, and families will be better able to support their child(ren) in building and using SEL skills throughout their lives.

Cultural Responsiveness:

Recognizing there is a reflection of culture in any selection and implementation of standards requires us to be thoughtful and responsive to the many diverse cultures of the students, families, educators, and staff that make up school communities. Culturally responsive education recognizes that every person, including teachers, principals, and district leaders, brings a cultural perspective in the way they interact with others. By working to understand, respect, and integrate diverse student identities and backgrounds into curricula, educators can create optimal learning opportunities for all students. Delivering a culturally responsive education requires ongoing attention to attitudes, environments, curricula, teaching strategies, and family/community involvement efforts. Applying the SEL Framework in a culturally responsive manner is a requirement for success.

Washington’s K-12 Social Emotional Learning Standards and Benchmarks

SELF-AWARENESS

Standard 1: Individual has the ability to identify and name one’s emotions and their influence on behavior.

- Benchmark 1A – Demonstrates awareness and understanding of one’s emotions.
- Benchmark 1B – Demonstrates knowledge of personal strengths, areas for growth, culture, linguistic assets and aspirations.
- Benchmark 1C – Demonstrates awareness and understanding of family, school, and community resources and supports.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Standard 2: Individual develops and demonstrates the ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in contexts with people different than oneself.

- Benchmark 2A – Demonstrates the skills to manage and express one’s emotions, thoughts, impulses, and stress in constructive ways.
- Benchmark 2B – Demonstrates constructive decision-making and problem solving skills.

SELF-EFFICACY

Standard 3: Individual has the ability to motivate oneself, persevere, and see oneself as capable.

- Benchmark 3A – Demonstrates the skills to set, monitor, adapt, persevere, achieve, and evaluate goals.
- Benchmark 3B – Demonstrates problem-solving skills to engage responsibly in a variety of situations.
- Benchmark 3C – Demonstrates awareness and ability to speak on behalf of personal rights and responsibilities.

SOCIAL AWARENESS Standard 4: Individual has the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

- Benchmark 4A – Demonstrates awareness of other people’s emotions, perspectives, cultures, language, history, identity, and ability.
- Benchmark 4B – Demonstrates an awareness and respect for one’s similarities and differences with others.
- Benchmark 4C – Demonstrates an understanding of the social norms of individual cultures.

SOCIAL MANAGEMENT

Standard 5: Individual has the ability to make safe and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions.

- Benchmark 5A – Demonstrates a range of communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.

- Benchmark 5B – Demonstrates the ability to identify and take steps to resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.
- Benchmark 5C – Demonstrates the ability to engage in constructive relationships with individuals of diverse perspectives, cultures, language, history, identity, and ability.

SOCIAL-ENGAGEMENT

Standard 6: Individual has the ability to consider others and a desire to contribute to the well-being of school and community.

- Benchmark 6A – Demonstrates a sense of social and community responsibility.
- Benchmark 6B – Demonstrates the ability to work with others to set, monitor, adapt, achieve, and evaluate goals.
- Benchmark 6C – Demonstrates effective strategies to contribute productively to one's school, workplace, and community.