

SUPPORTING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR ALL IN MASSACHUSETTS PUBLIC EDUCATION



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+++++ INTRODUCTION +++++

Teach Plus Massachusetts Fellows are educators who teach in a wide variety of traditional district and public charter schools. We are invested in how state education policy affects our classrooms and our students. As Teach Plus Policy Fellows and educators, we are concerned with the growing social and emotional needs of our students and educators. We believe that there is a great need to increase training of teacher candidates and professional development on social and emotional learning as a preventative program for educators throughout the Commonwealth.

What types of training do teacher candidates and educators across Massachusetts require to effectively address their students' social and emotional needs? New research on social and emotional learning (SEL) has shown a direct correlation between social competencies and academic achievement.¹ We chose to research SEL in education because of the impact it has on children's ability to learn and because we see a direct correlation between meeting student's social and emotional needs and academic achievement.

+++++ WHAT IS SEL? +++++

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.² The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is focused on incorporating evidence-based social and emotional learning as an integral part of the K-12 school systems. By focusing on research, practice, and policy, CASEL has developed a systematic framework which includes the five core competencies needed for students' social and emotional and academic development: Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, managing relationships, and responsible decision-making.³

SEL directly affects the student's ability to navigate interactions, relationships, and the educational curriculum on a daily basis. We know that children can learn empathy, respect, impulse control, responsible decision-making, and many other critical social and emotional competencies. Now, thanks to a growing body of research, we know that social and emotional skills, attitudes, and behaviors can be taught and that doing so has positive impacts on student learning outcomes. According to CASEL, "social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and worker; and many risky behaviors (e.g., drug use, violence, bullying, and dropout) can be prevented or reduced when multi-year, integrated efforts develop students' social and emotional skills."⁴

SEL is a high-leverage component of effective teaching and learning. When properly supported, it is a well-grounded framework that integrates theory, research, and practice to guide and improve school-based SEL programs. Using this framework, educators can develop a long-term vision and plan, adopt evidence-based SEL programs, effectively assess SEL-related resources and needs, develop SEL learning standards and assessments, and engage school and other stakeholders in this work to support the whole child.⁵

+++++ SEL POLICY IN MASSACHUSETTS +++++

In March 2018, the Massachusetts House of Representatives supported the [Bill H4363](#)⁶ and recommendations made from the published report: [Promote Prevent: A plan to promote mental, emotional and behavioral health and to prevent behavioral health issues in our Commonwealth](#)⁷ that was written by the Special Commission on Behavioral Health Promotion and Upstream Prevention. The original bill recommended that a portion of the Cannabis tax be earmarked for funding. In May 2018, the bill was renamed [Bill H4470](#)⁸ and moved to the Massachusetts committee on Health Care Financing. The new bill reviewed by the Health Care Financing committee, unlike the original bill, no longer earmarked a specific amount to be set aside from the Cannabis tax for funding preventative programs. In June 2018, the bill moved on to the Massachusetts Rules of the two branches, acting concurrently. It was recommended to pass and then sent to the Massachusetts House Ways and Means committee for review. The bill now awaits feedback from this committee and a date to be voted upon.

+++++ RECOMMENDATIONS +++++

We believe that teachers need tools and strategies to support students socially and emotionally so they can learn and grow academically. We fully support the recommendations made in the Promote Prevent report that include providing teacher candidates with training in SEL, increasing funding for evidence-based SEL programs in schools, and offering more in depth SEL trainings/professional development to teachers and school staff. We encourage

the Ways and Means committee to earmark specific funding for these preventive programs in the final version of the bill.

To be successful in meeting students' SEL needs in the Commonwealth, we believe that local colleges and universities, political leaders, policymakers, district and school administrators, and educators must work together to:

1. Support teacher candidates and statewide educators with SEL tools, strategies, and professional development opportunities and develop a statewide criteria of what SEL trainings should encompass.
2. Ensure all Massachusetts schools have SEL Ambassadors and ongoing SEL professional development.
3. Provide supports and increased staffing to address students' emotional challenges.
4. Develop guidelines for schools and districts on how to strengthen SEL through family and community engagement.
5. Research and recommend evidence-based statewide SEL curriculum options for all Massachusetts schools.

RECOMMENDATION 1: SUPPORT TEACHER CANDIDATES AND STATEWIDE EDUCATORS WITH SEL TOOLS, STRATEGIES, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND DEVELOP A STATEWIDE CRITERIA OF WHAT SEL TRAININGS SHOULD ENCOMPASS.

Based on a study conducted by CASEL in 47 states, we know that teacher preparatory programs do not address all five dimensions of SEL, with 17 states addressing one dimension, 16 states addressing two dimensions, and 14 states addressing three dimensions.⁹ For many educators, this represents the majority of SEL training we are provided with before entering the classroom.

Once in the classroom, teachers are immediately challenged by the social and emotional demands of students including behavioral needs and trauma that hinder academic progress. Without proper training, teacher candidates and teachers are inadequately equipped to meet the diverse needs of students. Teacher candidates need the necessary instruction and experience with

SEL, both before they enter the classroom and in a classroom setting, through coursework and professional development experiences.

The current rules to obtain or renew a Massachusetts teaching license do not include SEL requirements or required endorsements.¹⁰ We believe adding the requirement of an endorsement towards an initial licence and professional development points (PDP's) towards recertification will provide much-needed training opportunities for educators. Once teachers are in the classroom full time, professional development on SEL should be developed by schools and/or districts. This PD should be ongoing, provide strategies and tools for SEL, and be based on what teachers need to further enhance their social and emotional skills in the classroom.

TEACHER PREPARATORY PROGRAMS:

- + Require teacher candidates to obtain an SEL endorsement in order to receive their initial teaching license.
- + Require teacher preparatory programs to offer SEL coursework and pre-practicum experience that provides all teacher candidates with opportunities to learn best teaching practices for SEL and practice using those strategies during a pre-practicum/practicum experience.
- + Place pre-practicum students and student teachers with teachers who have been identified as proficient or exemplary in SEL practices.

TEACHER RECERTIFICATION:

- + Require educators to complete a minimum of 15 hours or PDP's of high-quality SEL professional development training as part of teacher recertification every five years.
- + Offer statewide SEL professional development to educators that is ongoing and includes the following: [all five dimensions of SEL](#), crisis and trauma interventions, and strategies for addressing tier 1, 2, and 3 behaviors.

RECOMMENDATION 2: ENSURE ALL MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOLS HAVE SEL AMBASSADORS AND ONGOING SEL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

Nearly half of new teachers leave the profession before their fifth year, and it is estimated that teacher turnover costs school districts about \$7 billion annually.¹¹ Providing appropriate supports, through synergistic professional development for teachers, could accelerate the pace at which teachers become proficient in the classroom and help to deter teacher burnout. Professional development in the forms of coaching and collaboration can be one of the most impactful types of support. More teachers want to spend more time being supported through lesson observations, coaching,

SEL AMBASSADORS:

We recommend that Massachusetts charter schools and districts create an SEL Ambassador role to support teachers in developing their own competencies and facilitating reflective practices through classroom observations, audio and/or video recordings, and tracked data. The SEL Ambassador would not be an evaluator, but a collaborator to develop teachers' comfort with SEL practices by developing their own. If the SEL Ambassador is a district-level staff member, then a school could request this

and in Professional Learning Communities, and want to 'self-select' PD that is more effective for them.¹² If we want teachers to help students and themselves to develop their social emotional competencies, then teachers will require effective PD. Teachers with high social and emotional competencies tend to have greater job satisfaction and therefore need opportunities and training to further develop their own skills in SEL. In many schools, the focus is placed primarily on the impact of SEL on students. There should be equal opportunities to focus on how it affects teachers as well.¹³

individual to support teachers over a four-to-five month period. If the SEL Ambassador is an on-site school-level teacher, then this added role/title should operate much like the role of a mentor teacher who would need an adjusted schedule to support other teachers. The SEL Ambassador should receive a stipend and be identified as proficient to exemplary in the SEL competencies and/or completed an accredited program geared to supporting the work of implementing and sustaining SEL practices.

RECOMMENDATION 3: PROVIDE SUPPORTS AND INCREASED STAFFING TO ADDRESS STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES.

There are currently 954,034 students enrolled in Massachusetts public schools. According to the Massachusetts Department of Education's school and district profile, there are 60,744.7 teachers, 697.6 non-special ed adjustment counselors (1 for every 1,367), 466.1 non-special education psychologist (1 for every 2,046 students), 321.3 non-special education social workers, (1 for every 2,968 students), and 9.7 Psychiatrists. (1 for every 98,324 students).¹⁴ The National Association for School Psychologist recommends a ratio of no

less than one psychologist per 1000 students.¹⁵

Thus, these numbers reflect inadequate SEL staffing for not only our most vulnerable population, but for all students. If students and teachers had more support for their social and emotional needs, we would then be equipped to help children experiencing an immediate crisis and to meet the SEL needs of all students in our schools.

FUNDING AND SUPPORT STAFF:

- + Provide each public school in Massachusetts with at least one school adjustment counselor per building to support all students' social and emotional needs.
- + Provide each school district with at least one school psychologist per 1000 students.
- + Develop a statewide baseline of support staff in schools based on the student population.

RECOMMENDATION 4: DEVELOP GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS ON HOW TO STRENGTHEN SEL THROUGH FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

Districts, schools, and educators are under increasing pressure to bridge the achievement gap and to prepare students for college and career readiness. As a state, we still struggle with identifying and then applying resources and strategies that can best help us to bridge this gap. Building family and community partnerships is one way to help narrow the achievement gap. Establishing and/or growing these partnerships, especially with community-based providers such as area social services, mental health, and welfare and area businesses, can help to provide the necessary out-of-school support for our students and families.

Teachers, through classroom-based activities that include family involvement, can share the SEL strategies, tools, and resources with families to reinforce the overall student growth. Social and emotional skills are

developed or further enhanced whenever a child interacts not just with fellow peers and teachers, but also with parents, other family members, and the community. Research shows that family involvement helps facilitate children's cognitive, social, and emotional learning and helps to develop more positive attitudes toward school, promotes better choices, and promotes higher self-esteem.¹⁶

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has initiated the Parent and Community Education and Involvement (PCEI) Advisory Council which aims to combine policy issues with shared purpose of families, educators communities, and organizations passionate about academic achievement and SEL for students. To further collaboration between schools, families, and communities and ensure the overall development of our future generation we recommend the following:

FAMILY/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

- + Develop statewide guidelines on how to expand family and community involvement to best meet the SEL needs of our students and school staff.
- + Develop an SEL coordinator position as a liaison between families, communities, and the school.
- + Develop opportunities for school districts and local educational institutions such as universities and colleges to partner with area schools for research, learning, and training purposes on SEL.

RECOMMENDATION 4: RESEARCH AND RECOMMEND EVIDENCE-BASED STATEWIDE SEL CURRICULUM OPTIONS FOR ALL MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOLS.

Teachers are now expected to incorporate SEL tools and strategies into their classrooms with minimal guidance on how to choose an evidence-based SEL curriculum. In order to

better inform and guide educators on how to choose evidence-based SEL curriculums and on how to use materials posted on the DESE website for SEL, we recommend the following:

DESE

- + Research and recommend evidence-based statewide SEL curriculum options for all Massachusetts schools.
- + Develop PD that provides ways to use evidence-based SEL curriculums in classrooms and schools.
- + Require each district to create a guide of online SEL resources for their educators to use.
- + Separate department guidance documents into sections for elementary, middle school, and high school resources.
- + Conduct periodic workshops around the state to make teachers and administrators aware of the SEL resources available on the DESE website.

+++++ CONCLUSION +++++

SEL is a preventative program that students, families, schools, and the community benefit from. Children who lack SEL competencies are more vulnerable to engaging in risky behaviors, including substance use. A [2015 analysis from Columbia University](#) estimated that for every \$1 invested in SEL prevention strategies, the community saves \$11 in costs related to substance abuse, youth delinquency, juvenile crime, and more.¹⁷ Earmarking funding for evidence-based SEL programs in schools and opportunities for more in depth SEL trainings/PD to teacher candidates, teachers, and school staff is key to meeting the diverse needs of all students. We support that a portion of the Cannabis tax be used to help fund ongoing workshops, trainings, PD, and SEL resources for students, educators, and families as recommended in the report: [Promote Prevent: A plan to promote mental, emotional, and behavioral health and to prevent behavioral health issues in the Commonwealth](#). Bill H4470 could fund these recommendations by earmarking a set amount to SEL.

We offer our recommendations as classroom practitioners to encourage Massachusetts educators and policymakers to increase pathways for training and funding on SEL to schools and districts across the Commonwealth. Meeting the SEL needs of students and teachers is vital to academic achievement and the prevention of potential at-risk behaviors. Through collaborative planning at the state, district, and school level, we will be able to create and implement statewide high-quality SEL programs that would further enhance Massachusetts' reputation as the leading state in the nation.

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