

Social Emotional Learning in Grades K–3: Implementing Senate Bill 5395 (2020)

Senate Bill (SB) 5395, passed in 2020 by the Washington State Legislature and voters, requires all school districts to provide social emotional learning (SEL) in kindergarten through grade 3 (K–3) by the 2022–23 school year.

What is social emotional learning?

Social emotional learning (SEL) is a process of building awareness and skills in managing emotions, setting goals, establishing relationships, and making responsible decisions that support success in school and in life. It helps students with the basics, like getting along with others and getting through the school day effectively. Most school districts are already providing SEL to students in grades K–3.

How does SEL help students?

More than two decades of research on SEL shows strong benefits for students, including:

- Increased academic performance
- Improved classroom behavior
- Increased ability to manage stress and depression
- Better attitudes about themselves, others, and school
- Improved lifetime outcomesⁱ

SB 5395 requires SEL to be taught “once” – what does that mean?

Districts have flexibility in determining how much SEL instruction they provide. However, the research is clear that in order to gain the benefits listed above, several things are important:

- Programs are offered over time, ideally with multiple years of programming
- Programs target all areas of SEL competence (see [SEL Standards and Benchmarks](#))
- Students have opportunities to learn and practice SEL skills
- Teachers and other adults in the school get training in SEL
- Classroom instruction in SEL is combined with school-wide activities
- Families are engaged in genuine partnerships with the schoolⁱⁱ

What kinds of curricula are available to teach SEL?

There are many programs available for districts to choose from and OSPI will identify resources available to districts and families. One such resource, [Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs - Preschool and Elementary School Edition](#), is available from CASEL, the Collaborative



for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. If a district is using a curriculum for instruction, parents and guardians can always request to review the curriculum.

The bill says instruction must be consistent with state SEL Standards and Benchmarks – where do I find those?

[SEL Standards and Benchmarks](#), along with indicators for each grade band, can be found with many other resources on [OSPI's SEL webpage](#).

SB 5395 requires schools to provide comprehensive sexual health education – will sexual health education also be required in K–3?

No sexuality content or curriculum is required for grades K–3. Social emotional learning (SEL) is the only new requirement for grades K–3.

How does the opt-out provision apply to social emotional learning?

Social emotional learning is woven throughout the K–3 school day as an important way to help students learn to get along with each other and be successful in the classroom. It is a school-wide approach and does not always include formal lessons. Parents and guardians who have questions or concerns about SEL should contact their school or district.

^{i, ii} CASEL (2012). [Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs - Preschool and Elementary School Edition](#).