

June 9, 2020

Superintendent Chris Reykdal
Office of the Superintendent
600 Washington St. SE
Olympia, WA 98504

Cc: Chief of Staff Jamila Thomas
Deputy Superintendent Michaela Miller
Assistant Superintendent Martin Mueller

Re: Social Emotional Learning Advisory Committee Policy Recommendations

Dear Superintendent Reykdal,

The Washington State Legislature authorized our Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Advisory Committee to continue to develop statewide support to advance and promote SEL. Notably, we were charged to A) **identify SEL strategies to improve coordination** between early learning education, K-12 education, youth-serving community partners, culturally-based providers, and higher education, and B) **identify best practices or guidance** for schools implementing the standards, benchmarks, and developmental indicators for SEL.

The COVID-19 Pandemic is impacting life for educators and families in every school and community across the state. Whether in an urban school district or a rural county, students and educators are all dealing with the stress and anxiety associated with disrupted lives. School buildings have closed for the remainder of the academic year and have shifted to virtual learning. Plans for summer learning programs, as well as plans for fall instruction and placement are uncertain. During these unprecedented times, our interconnectedness has never been more clearly on display, while our inequities are equally apparent.

As has been seen time and again, SEL competencies offer a powerful means to support one another – children and adults – during both normal and challenging times. The enormous shift to virtual learning actually makes SEL, and systemic implementation of SEL across schools and districts, more important than ever. Implementing SEL with fidelity ensures that schools are providing encouraging, safe, and supportive school communities while continuing to focus on student strengths, necessary tiered supports, and positive relationship development. Implementation of SEL symbiotically feeds the well-being of educators who are educating students even as they are personally impacted by recent events.

Let us recognize that, from pandemic to racial injustice and related unrest, students and educators alike may have experienced trauma during this time. Responding to that trauma is necessary in its own right, but also we cannot expect high levels of academic learning without responding to that trauma with supports in place that prioritize SEL. Educators, students, and families are being called on to demonstrate empathy and resilience, build relationships across distance, and to utilize their collective resolve to

strengthen our schools and our communities. In this time of great need, **our committee wishes to provide the below recommendations** on how to prioritize and provide SEL resources to educators and students at all levels.

1. Formally adopt and align state offices, agencies, and department work that serves the mental and behavioral wellness of youth, to a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework;¹
2. Incorporate in that framework under Tier I the OSPI SEL standards, benchmarks, and related work;
3. Prioritize SEL funding and MTSS emergency and regular budget funding in relation to remote learning during stay-at-home orders and in relation to learning after stay-at-home orders are lifted, including eventual LEA re-entry plans;
4. Request or encourage LEA re-entry plans articulate how they will prioritize SEL under an MTSS framework;
5. Request or encourage LEA re-entry plans further articulate how they will develop adult SEL professional learning;
6. Request or encourage LEA re-entry plans articulate how the SEL efforts in schools will coordinate with out-of-school time (OST) SEL offerings.

Every youth-serving professional has a role to play and a meaningful contribution to make within MTSS, *everyone*, including: principals, educators, school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, school social workers, out-of-school time (OST) providers, and community-based providers. MTSS provides an efficient framework by which to effectively organize all adults who work with youth in furtherance of their mental wellbeing, including their social-emotional wellbeing, best provided for within tier I of MTSS. (We have attached collateral to help show how these roles show up within the framework.)

It is paramount that Washington prioritizes SEL in order to help reintegrate educators and youth back into school settings both virtually and in-person throughout the summer and fall. The bipartisan *Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act* included a \$30.75 billion Education Stabilization Fund that would run through the Department of Education to states, with \$3.01 billion for a Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund, and \$13.5 billion for K-12 flowing directly to states and districts. While the law gives states and locals flexibility to address the individual needs of their districts, the law specifically calls out using funds to support the social and emotional needs of constituents. **The state should not use these federal funds to supplement or supplant funds from state or local coffers.** Rather, it should independently reflect SEL as a state priority in state budgetary considerations, using these federal funds to augment and complement those considerations.

Our committee recognizes the mounting decisions state leaders must make with finite resources. We implore state leaders to recognize the mental health and well-being of students as a priority both in leveraging federal funds as well as independently for state budgetary considerations. Our youth, educators, and families of all backgrounds must be able to engage in and access SEL educational

¹ MTSS is already an organizational framework developed within OSPI, especially as captured in the Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol (WISSP). One notable feature of WISSP is that it provides for a referral system for young people who need targeted mental health support, as well as access to school-employed and community-based mental health professionals.

opportunities as we weather this pandemic. The success and well-being of our communities and state's next generation of leaders depends on it.

Respectfully submitted,

Washington State Social Emotional Learning Advisory Committee