



## Social and Emotional Learning in Shrewsbury

### Overview

A community's aspirations are captured well in the hopes it holds for its children. In Shrewsbury, one of our Five-Year Strategic Priorities includes the *Enhanced Well-being of All*. One of the goals supporting this priority is the following: ***“By December 2019, create a district-level implementation plan for effective social and emotional learning expectations and practices.”*** We are tasked to “Create a common understanding of the benefits of the skills, habits, and mindsets of social and emotional learning and develop a shared, systematic approach to explicitly teach, integrate, and assess these competencies.” In December, 2018, the district adopted a common framework for social emotional learning (SEL), which set the stage for identifying our approach to implementation, beginning with a definition of SEL that comes from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): *SEL is the process of developing students' and adults' social and emotional competencies—the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that individuals need to make successful choices.*

This report includes information regarding:

- CASEL's recommendations for implementation
- Guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) on SEL, and
- our recommendations for Shrewsbury's SEL plan

Related documents and additional information can be located under the Resources addendum.

### Social Emotional Learning

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identifies five core competencies of social emotional learning:

- **Self-awareness:** The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.
- **Self-management:** The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.

- **Social awareness:** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.
- **Relationship skills:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.
- **Responsible decision making:** The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the wellbeing of self and others.

In addition to a framework, CASEL's website has a wealth of information, including research that demonstrates the importance of a cohesive approach to implementation. Our own survey results suggest that it's time to organize building-based efforts into a comprehensive district plan. Further, staff attendance at state conferences held by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and organizations including Transforming Education and the Rennie Center, fueled our efforts to:

- **Engage** with our stakeholders, especially our teachers, administrators, and specialized instructional support personnel
- **Integrate** SEL principles with existing policies, resources, and initiatives; and
- **Explore** useful, well-aligned resources

Our vision for how SEL will be integrated into district prek-12 classrooms was also informed by the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support model, which pairs academic standards with social emotional learning competencies and advocates for a differentiated approach to instruction.

### Developing SEL Competencies - a tiered approach

In each of our schools educators have begun learning about and implementing programs that strengthen character, work habits and emotional regulation. All of these efforts contribute to a shared vision of student support. However, given the homegrown nature of these building-based initiatives, to date school efforts have not been coordinated. Using the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) blueprint helped district leaders to recognize the importance of moving forward together to meet students' academic and behavioral needs. In part this report is a response to meeting those needs.

Recently, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) updated its MTSS Blueprint to incorporate a tiered approach to SEL as well as Academics and Behavior. In a tiered approach, educators provide high quality SEL



instruction (free-standing as well as integrated into other subjects) and general practices that support SEL, to help all students develop SEL core competencies (tier one). Educators and support staff also use data to inform when additional efforts are needed, and provide (or help access) supplemental supports based on individual students' social and emotional needs (tier two). Additionally, more intensive supports are provided for individual student needs that are more urgent and/or intensive (tier three). Tier one SEL will generally occur in whole-school, whole-class settings, while tier two and three supports may be provided through targeted group instruction, embedded within a classroom setting, in individualized work with students, in counseling sessions, or in other settings as appropriate.

## **Social Emotional Learning in the Shrewsbury Public Schools**

Shrewsbury is justifiably proud of the contributions our educators make to teaching and learning. We want to acknowledge that our understanding of the importance of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has been shaped by the experiences of students and teachers in our classrooms. Across the district, individual educators and teams have developed resources that translated knowledge into practice. As a result, we have an array of models for SEL to consider. At the same time, these models depict a diversity of approach rather than common commitments. In order to craft a district plan we needed to engage educators at both the building and district level.

In the fall of 2019, each of our nine school principals formed an SEL committee. These building-based groups sent representatives to the District SEL Steering Committee. In this way we were able to build a common understanding and to elicit a lot of information about district strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. As mentioned previously, the first task of the Steering Committee was to select an SEL framework. In turn the CASEL framework guided the development of this plan.

### **Building-Based SEL Committee Contributions**

Building based committees took inventory of current practices. We took note of building-based efforts to promote safe and supportive school climates and instructional moves that foster social emotional learning in our classrooms. We also began to identify which topics were taught by grade and/or level. As part of the process, we heard about many promising practices. Identifying "bright spots" was important, because it's clear that we will grow from strength. Every school has already begun this work in some way. Now our challenge is to coordinate our efforts, within and across each level. As we go forward, staff leaders will no doubt play a part of professional development. In this way we will ensure that all our students receive a guaranteed and viable<sup>1</sup> curriculum, with opportunities to develop and apply SEL competencies across grade spans. This is especially important at the PreK-Elementary level. Students at this age are still developing emotionally and socially, and it is vital that they are supported in their transitions to next level. Common language and a consistent approach will help students to make sense of new expectations at every grade span.

### **District SEL Steering Committee Contributions**

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<sup>1</sup> A "guaranteed" curriculum is often defined as a mechanism through which all students have an equal opportunity (time and access) to learn rigorous content. For a curriculum to be "viable," there must be adequate time for teachers to teach the content and for students to learn the content. A viable curriculum eliminates the supplementary or "nice to know" content. (Marzano, 2003)

Members of the district steering committee were key contributors to the planning process; each representative served a dual role. Members bring their insights to the Committee meetings and shape our agendas. Just as importantly, teachers and specialists on the Committee share information with colleagues back in their home school(s).

For this reason, our district steering committee consists of three smaller subcommittees for Curriculum, Culture and Student Supports. Each group has worked collaboratively to gather information regarding current practices to identify areas of strength and need, and to make recommendations for next steps. This plan reflects the input of each committee, as well as the thoughts of the district leaders in each of our schools, that have been championing SEL work to date.

As part of our implementation plan, we believe it’s important to reinforce, extend and apply skills in each competency area in age-appropriate situations at each grade level and throughout the academic day. In order to do that, district representatives will need to come to consensus on SEL outcomes by grade level span. In addition, each school will continue to develop routines and practices that offer students opportunities to practice and apply their skills across settings and environments and to receive feedback and reinforcement on their use of the skills. Finally, school leaders will act to develop and sustain school cultures where all the adults model social emotional skills.

What will this look like over time? The timeline below depicts our initial thinking about how best to begin.

2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Inventory <i>What’s in place now?</i>	Identify resources <i>How will we develop SEL competencies?</i>	Explore feedback mechanisms <i>How will we monitor progress?</i>

**What does SEL look like in action?**

Research supports a multi-pronged approach to SEL instruction. In fact, both CASEL and the DESE have both identified [four general approaches](#) to SEL instruction in the classroom:

- Free-standing lessons that provide explicit, step-by step instructions to teach students social and emotional competencies across the five core competency clusters;
- General teaching practices that create classroom and school-wide conditions that facilitate and support social and emotional development in students;
- Integration of skill instruction and practices that support SEL within the context of an academic curriculum; *and*
- Guidance to administrators and school leaders on how to facilitate SEL as a school-wide initiative.

With the adoption of the CASEL framework we are beginning to look at the challenge of balancing consistency of expectations with the importance of allowing our educators flexibility to meet the needs of their students. At all levels, educators and district leaders are working together to identify

common language, common approaches, and common resources. Each level will work to identify free standing lessons, general teaching practices, integration of skills instruction in the curriculum and guidance to leaders for school wide engagement.

At all levels (Pre-K, Kindergarten, Elementary, Middle and High) SEL practices support the development of skills necessary for success in school and life. These include spending time getting to know students, forming a welcoming classroom community at the beginning of the school year, having regular, predictable classroom routines contributes to a safe learning environment, and allowing for student involvement in class decision-making. These efforts increase student engagement and motivation for learning and prepares them to set meaningful goals, to reflect, and ultimately, to grow.

### **Pre-K through Grade 4**

All six of our Elementary schools already share some common structures for furthering student learning. *Responsive Classroom* is a commonly used approach for students in grades [Pre-Kindergarten](#) through Grade 8. This approach emphasizes social, emotional, and academic growth. The components of Responsive Classroom at the elementary level include:

- Morning Meeting
- Interactive Modeling
- Academic choice
- Establishing Rules and Routines

Each component is tied to a different aspect of social emotional learning. Taken together, these structures are the vehicles that educators use to model and teach explicit skills, to meaningfully practice SEL competencies in daily interactions and to reinforce a growth mindset.

For the remainder of the year steering committee curriculum subgroup members will consider the array of resources available and decide on research-based program(s) that educators will use to explicitly target SEL competencies. Some programs we may consider are listed under the Resources section at the end of this report.

### **Middle School, Grades 5-8**

Sherwood Middle School has adopted Responsive Advisory. This meeting model provides a space and structure for teachers to support middle school students on a daily basis, both individually and collectively, as they develop their sense of self and identity in connection to their relationships with peers. Responsive Advisory Meeting uses four components (arrival welcome, announcements, acknowledgments, and activity) to meet students' needs for belonging, significance, and fun while helping them build skills and explore their interests. Responsive Advisory Meeting serves as an anchor for middle level students, a predictable routine that students need more than ever as they undergo rapid physical, emotional, and intellectual changes. Advisory provides a space and structure for teachers to support middle school students, both individually and as a group, as they develop their sense of self and identity in connection to their relationships with peers.

Oak Middle School is in the process of exploring scheduling options for an advisory program. This work has been on-going over the past few years, and was identified as an important component of OMS's self-study. An Advisory program is a crucial component of middle school because it connects an educator (the advisor) with a group of students (the advisees) to provide academic and social-emotional support, and to strengthen the community of the school. This structured approach is done with intention. The objectives include:

- Support students in building positive, meaningful relationships with one or more caring adults at school
- Help students develop positive relationships with their peers
- Provide a safe place for students to strengthen their academic and social-emotional competencies, explore their interests more deeply, and nurture the development of new skills and talents

Sherwood Middle School and Oak Middle School assess students' social, emotional, and academic progress using the Habits Of Work and Learning Standards (HOWLS) in all areas of the curriculum. Research demonstrates that it is critical for students to receive consistent messages from the adults with whom they interact at school and beyond the school day. Adult-student relationships strengthen the level of connectedness that the student feels between home and school.

Leadership and service opportunities are offered to all students at SMS and OMS. For example, Student Voice Crews (SMS) and the Community Service and Leadership Club (OMS) provide students with diverse learning experiences that seek to meet the needs of our school, local, and global communities.

### **High School, Grades 9-12**

Shrewsbury High School has endorsed an Advisory approach to teaching social emotional learning skills. Beginning this year, a small group of staff facilitated the gradual implementation of Advisory meetings with the goal that teachers would lead four meetings in all. This experience led to consensus that more meetings- and a program to inform meeting topics- was necessary. For that reason, leaders at this level have elected to train all staff using [Character Strong](#), a program that seeks to develop social emotional learning competencies in students and educators alike. With the firm belief that 'SEL is for everyone,' the Character Strong program features:

- vertically aligned, 30 minute lessons for grades 9-12 that target character strengths and SEL skills such as Empathy, Healthy Habit Development, Resilience, Emotional Intelligence, Mindfulness, Influence, Stress Regulation, Growth Mindset, Civil Discourse
- interactive games and activities designed to help students practice
- CharacterDares challenges that task students and staff to apply SEL skills outside the classroom, and
- resources for families

The Character Strong curriculum for this level was designed with the adolescent learner and a high school schedule in mind. As a result, educators that use the program draw on an array of multimedia materials to teach and reinforce SEL competencies in short bursts over time.

The timeline below outlines SPS' Social Emotional Learning objectives for the next 3 years.

Year 1: 2019-2020	Year 2: 2020-2021	Year 3: 2021-2022
SLT training on MTSS and progress monitoring tools to build understanding of how we are all accountable for the work	Training focused on MTSS with information regarding how we are all accountable for the work  Identify consistent programming to deliver social, emotional and behavioral support through the MTSS lens	Implement and monitor effectiveness of programming as a tiered approach; make modifications as needed
Research and identify specific professional development for all staff for a phased roll out of SEL approaches across the district	Provide professional development related to consistent programming to staff (SEL Competencies/Responsive Classroom/Advisory/Character Strong)	Define SEL growth and progress in SEL Competencies/Responsive Classroom/Advisory.  Share and collect progress monitoring tools to begin to collect student data  Monitor the effectiveness of the PD through Early Intervening Teams data/HOWLS marks/Student Support Teams
Identify staff to be trained as SEL teacher leaders/trainers across all levels	Trainers will work together across buildings to build consensus and programming	Additional staff will be identified to become trainers/mentors/new staff training

In conclusion, the Shrewsbury Public Schools is committed to the social emotional learning for all students in and out of the classroom and community. John Dewey once said, “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children.” It’s our sincere hope that through the adoption of the CASEL Social Emotional Learning wheel and competencies, guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) on SEL and the implementation Shrewsbury’s SEL plan at the building and district level, the Shrewsbury Public Schools will continue to achieve the very best- academically, socially and emotionally- for all our students.

## **Addendum: Related Research & Resources**

### **Teaching social emotional competencies in schools**

2011 [meta-analysis](#) of 213 school-based, universal SEL programs

2017 [meta-analysis](#) reviewed 82 school-based, universal SEL interventions. The study found that school-based SEL interventions continue to benefit students for months and even years to come. [Columbia University report](#) found that every \$1 invested in SEL programming produced on average an \$11 return.

### **Implementation guidance**

This [summary document](#) provides brief highlights of the Department's efforts to support SEL and notes that the DESE is beginning the process of revising the 1999 [Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework](#).

Massachusetts districts may find CASEL's [Collaborating Districts Initiative](#) website to be a valuable source for SEL resources.

### **Educator Resources**

[Guidebook](#) for Inclusive Practice

[Professional Standards](#) for Teachers and Administrators

[Massachusetts Multi-Tiered Systems of Support](#) (MTSS)

CASEL: [What Does Evidence-Based Instruction in Social and Emotional Learning Actually Look Like in Practice?](#) October, 2015

DESE Leading Educational Access Project [webpage](#)

DESE [Cultural Proficiency Resources](#) SEL for All

### **Curriculum Resources**

CASEL Guide to [Preschool & Elementary SEL](#) program reviews

CASEL Guide to [Middle and High School SEL](#) program reviews

### **SEL Learning Targets**

PreK-K [Standards](#) on SEL and Approaches to Play and Learning (APL)

CASEL document outlining [state-based learning targets](#) for grades K-12 across the United States