



**To:** Emily Parks, Superintendent  
**From:** Allison Borchers, Assistant Superintendent  
**Cc:** Abby Hanscom, Director of Student Services  
Erin Kuehn, SEL Coordinator  
**Date:** June 2, 2021  
**Re:** SEL update

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### **Background**

For the past two years the district has been engaged in the work of developing and implementing a plan for meeting students' social and emotional learning needs (WPS Strategic Priorities 3.1) A review of SEL curriculum and instruction K-12 was completed in 2019. Following that review, the district created a new SEL Coordinator K-8 position, filled that role, and tasked the new coordinator with overseeing implementation of recommendations. During the pandemic, the district has continued to make progress toward the goal of meeting the needs of our students in this critical area.

### **This School Year and Beyond**

Last fall, grant funding from the Foundation for Westwood Education allowed the district to make two major investments in SEL resources: the Panorama Social Emotional Learning Survey tool was purchased and administered for the first time in grades 3 - 12 in January, and Second Steps middle school curriculum materials were provided to Thurston teachers as a tool to support SEL.

SEL Coordinator Erin Kuehn worked with a team of educators throughout the district to examine results of Panorama, to share those results with administrators and school staff, and to propose a regular cycle of assessment and data review to help support the district's efforts moving forward. Ms. Kuehn will share an overview of the Panorama results at the Westwood School Committee meeting on June 10, 2021. Starting next fall, the survey will be administered three times a year in order to track changes in students' beliefs and attitudes about their SEL skills. Panorama results, combined with other data, will help inform the coordinator and a district-wide SEL leadership team about the impact of SEL efforts in the Westwood Public Schools.

This year, middle school teachers had the chance to pilot various lessons and activities from the Second Step program. Over the summer, Ms. Kuehn will work with middle school teachers to map out lessons so that there is a clear scope and sequence for advisory teachers to follow starting next fall. Lessons will be restructured to fit the time and established structured for advisory blocks.

At Westwood High School, the Dean of Students position was updated to reflect a responsibility for leadership around SEL initiatives. The new Dean will partner with the K-8 Coordinator to ensure that we are providing a developmentally-appropriate K-12 continuum of social emotional learning opportunities. In addition, the revised high school schedule for 2021-2022 allows for fewer class meetings per day and

a stable “support block” - shifts that will create opportunities for our oldest students develop and practice their SEL competencies in critical areas (e.g., seeking and offering support, reflection and problem solving, using organization and planning skills) that support academic success.

Just before the school closure last March, an initial cohort of 30 elementary educators was trained in Responsive Classroom - an approach that helps teachers create opportunities for SEL throughout the school days. Since that time, large group training options have been limited, but we have been able to send several additional elementary educators to virtual training. In June, our second full cohort of teachers will be trained. Ms. Kuehn will also be offering an in-district follow up course next year for teachers who have completed initial RC training but want to dive deeper into thinking about how classroom routines and specific instructional strategies can support SEL. In addition, a teacher-led introductory course, informed by ideas and texts from Responsive Classroom, will be provided for new teachers to Westwood as part of the induction program.

While Responsive Classroom equips teachers with specific strategies to facilitate SEL throughout the day, a curriculum that offers opportunities for explicit instruction is an important component of a robust program. During the SEL review, elementary educators expressed concern that our current curriculum--Open Circle--is not as effective as they would like it to be, particularly for older elementary students. In response to that concern, Ms. Kuehn led a team of teachers in analyzing several well-regarded alternatives and selecting a new curriculum resource to pilot in K - 5 classrooms next school year. The pilot team of 16 teachers will attend an initial training, teach a weekly SEL lesson from the curriculum, collect data to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum in supporting the teaching and practicing of students’ social-emotional skills, and gather monthly to share results with one another and the SEL coordinator.

It is worth noting that the pilot curriculum, AMAZEworks, was selected by the team in part because of its intentional integration of SEL with lessons that support diversity, equity and integration. Available relevant data, including VOCAL (Views of Climate and Learning) data from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and initial data from the Panorama, shows clear and concerning gaps in our BIPOC students’ self-reported confidence in critical SEL areas.

Two additional priorities that have emerged this year for the immediate future that will support ongoing efforts are 1) the formation of a district SEL leadership team to generate a clear vision for SEL in Westwood, support consistent implementation of SEL-related initiatives, analyze data about the impact of these initiatives and refine our efforts in response to data; and 2) the formation of an advisory group to provide input about in-school efforts and assist in the planning of out-of-school programming for parents and families.