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November 1, 2021

The Honorable Rosyln C. Tyler
Chair, House Education
Pocahontas Building, Room E306
900 East Main Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas
Chair, Senate Education and Health
Pocahontas Building, Room No: E604
Richmond, Virginia 23219

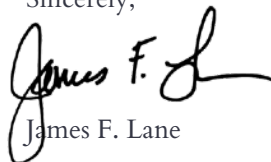
Dear Mesdames:

I am pleased to submit the enclosed report that describes the Virginia Department of Education's recommendations to support Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in Virginia Public Schools.

House Bill 753 from the 2020 session of the Virginia General Assembly specifically required that the Virginia Department of Education issue a report no later than November 1, 2021, on the resources needed to successfully support local school divisions with the implementation of a statewide social-emotional learning program.

Please direct questions to Holly Coy, Assistant Superintendent of Policy and Communications, by email at Holly.Coy@doe.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,



James F. Lane

JFL/SMH

Enclosure

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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT  F EDUCATION

REPORT

Final Report and Recommendations to Support Social Emotional Learning in Virginia Public Schools

Presented to:

Virginia General Assembly

November 1, 2021

Virginia Department of Education

P. O. Box 2120

Richmond, Virginia 23218-2120



Background

In 2020, the Virginia General Assembly passed House Bill 753, directing the Virginia Department of Education to (i) establish a uniform definition of social emotional learning and develop guidance standards for social emotional learning for all public students in grades kindergarten through 12 in the Commonwealth; (ii) make such standards available to each local school division no later than July 1, 2021; and (iii) issue a report no later than November 1, 2021, on the resources needed to successfully support local school divisions with the implementation of a statewide social emotional learning program.

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) assembled an interdepartmental team to create a plan for social emotional learning (SEL) implementation in Virginia. The SEL Implementation Team identified VDOE priorities that needed to be considered in the creation of Virginia’s vision and definition of SEL. The Team worked with the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a national technical assistance center, to bring Virginia’s unique vision of SEL to all K-12 students. The Team focused on existing VDOE initiatives that reflected this vision. In doing so, the SEL Standards are aligned with the Profile of a Virginia Graduate and existing departmental guidance and initiatives. This intentional focus allows the Standards to explicitly teach the skills needed to be “life ready” and to create more equitable learning environments.

Virginia defines social emotional learning as: *The process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.*

The VDOE SEL Implementation Team assembled a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Advisory Committee composed of teachers, school leaders, specialized instructional support specialists, community leaders, state agency personnel, and parents from across the Commonwealth to guide the development of the [Virginia Social Emotional Learning \(SEL\) Guidance Standards](#) for grades K-12. [Superintendent’s Memo #178-21](#) (July 2, 2021) announced the availability of the SEL Guidance Standards to Virginia school divisions.

The VDOE’s [Social Emotional Learning \(SEL\)](#) efforts are driven by our commitment to ensure that every student in Virginia attends a school that maximizes their potential and prepares them for the future academically, socially, and emotionally. The Department has added a dedicated [SEL Guidance Standards webpage](#) that houses additional tools and resources to assist with implementation of the Standards.

The SEL Advisory Committee reconvened after the Standards were developed to discuss what resources divisions need to implement SEL in local school divisions across the state. The

feedback gathered from this Committee helped inform the development of the recommendations made in this report.

Recommendation 1

Direct the VDOE to develop and provide implementation resources to successfully support local school divisions with the implementation of a statewide SEL program. The implementation resources shall include:

- A. Professional development for teachers, administrators, school counselors, and other specialized instructional support personnel on schoolwide SEL implementation;**
- B. Grade band-specific curriculum frameworks and academic content crosswalks to support implementation across all content areas;**
- C. Guidance on the alignment of evidence-based SEL practices within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS); and**
- D. Guidance on assessing the fidelity of SEL implementation that may be used across evidence-based SEL practices.**

A. Professional Development:

When SEL is implemented, students show benefits in their academics, attitudes, and behaviors while teachers experience greater job satisfaction (Dvurlak et al., 2011). But, in order to achieve success, educators need to have the knowledge and tools to implement SEL in the way that it is intended. Professional development is critical in the development of an educator's social and emotional competence. Also referred to as Adult SEL, this is the process of helping educators build their expertise and skills to lead social and emotional learning initiatives. It also involves cultivating adults' own social and emotional competencies. Building systemic SEL throughout the state will assist adults who have social, emotional, cognitive, and cultural competencies themselves (adult SEL competencies), with skills to be able to translate knowledge of SEL to effective, evidence-based implementation equitably for all students (adult capacity) (Mahoney et al., 2020).

Research suggests that adult SEL influences the quality of student-teacher relationships, classroom management, and overall school climate (Jones et al., 2019). Additionally, valuing and developing the SEL needs of school staff has been shown to decrease burnout and increase teacher retention (Jennings et. al., 2013). School leaders need to know how to develop the social and emotional competence of the school staff, and teachers need to learn how social and emotional competencies can be woven into the teaching of core academic content and curriculum. Professional development needs to vary throughout the state as school divisions are in different stages of SEL implementation. Professional development creates the foundation needed to move from learning to planning to implementation.

The following are some examples of specific SEL professional development topics of interest generated by state stakeholders:

1. Professional learning to the school community on what SEL is and how it can be supported and reinforced.
2. Professional learning to division and school leaders on building adult or educator SEL to support and enhance their SEL implementation.
3. Creating SEL modules and webinars to build educators' understanding of SEL and how it can be implemented.
4. Scaffolding staff professional learning by readiness and topic.
 - a) Include a self-assessment to identify readiness indicators to guide staff to the appropriate professional development entry point. Offer SEL training specific to the readiness level of the staff.
 - b) Offer differentiated professional learning based on school role (i.e., administrator, teacher, school counselor, and cafeteria worker).
 - c) Provide professional learning on measuring SEL and what indicators schools have or may seek to measure progress.

B. Curriculum Framework and Implementation Resources:

Sufficient resources are needed at the state level to support SEL implementation in Virginia school divisions. Local educational agencies will require implementation guidance that incorporates evidence-based, systemic practices at the classroom, school, and division levels. Divisions and schools will need to examine current practices and policies to help identify what they have in place and how they can grow to support schoolwide SEL. The SEL curriculum frameworks will transform the SEL Guidance Standards into instructional expectations with practices and strategies to support the learning. Alignment tools, such as content specific curriculum mapping tools, will allow teachers to learn how to integrate SEL into content areas. Additionally, resources are needed to help educators understand how to modify the SEL curriculum when teaching special populations, such as students with disabilities and English language learners. To enhance implementation success, educators will need ongoing support from the state level. Some examples of implementation resources include the following:

1. Create a guide to build educator awareness of SEL and how it can be integrated into Virginia schools. This guide would offer insights into the shared responsibilities that all educators have in schoolwide SEL integration and the ways that SEL promotes inclusion.
2. Create K-12 SEL curriculum frameworks to provide clarity around the intent of each standard as well as to identify the specific skills that students need in each grade band to meet the standards. The curriculum frameworks for each grade band would include educator background information, cultural and developmental considerations, self-reflection opportunities, and instructional strategies to assist teachers.

3. Regular review and revision of SEL Guidance Standards and corresponding Curriculum Frameworks to mirror that of instructional standards of learning.
4. Create a **Profile of an SEL School** to highlight what schoolwide SEL looks like in practice. The Profile would include a rubric that schools can use to assess current practices and policies that support school and classroom SEL and data collection, or to identify needs and support growth.
5. Collaborate with other VDOE specialists to create an SEL toolkit for special populations (i.e., students with disabilities and English language learners).
6. Collaborate with VDOE instructional specialists to create content specific crosswalks of SEL standards and instructional (content areas) standards.
7. Create professional learning communities (PLCs) state and division-wide where educators can share ideas and collaborate.
8. Provide technical assistance to support SEL implementation at the division and school levels.
9. Provide ongoing coaching to divisions and schools to support SEL implementation.

C. Alignment of SEL within a Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS):

SEL is a teaching and learning process that infuses SEL into every part of students' lives. SEL has the greatest potential to support and elevate outcomes for students when implementation is systemic, that is, infused throughout programs and practices and educational settings at all levels of the system (Mahoney et al., 2020). Implementation of SEL within tiers of support provides students with instruction that not only is differentiated to meet their academic needs, but also is affirming, culturally relevant, and intentionally removes barriers for historically underserved students.

The following are foundational principles about how systemic, schoolwide SEL can drive equity and support student thriving. Taken together, the principles provide the rationale for integrating SEL into MTSS (Council of Chief State School Offices, 2021).

1. All students and adults thrive in a safe, just, and supportive school climate.
2. SEL is foundational to academics and behavior.
3. All students have equitable access to a tiered system of supports with SEL at the Resource Center.
4. Social and emotional skills are intentionally fostered using evidence-based, culturally relevant, equity-focused, and developmentally appropriate practices supported by SEL learning standards.
5. Youth voice and engagement support the development of student identity, agency, and belonging.
6. Adult SEL and professional development is intentionally supported to ensure student SEL is fostered and skills are modeled by adults working with students.
7. Families, caregivers, and communities are critical partners in building equitable systems that support students' academic, social, and emotional development.

8. Supportive discipline policies and practices are instructive, restorative, developmentally appropriate, and equitably applied.

The Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS) provides a data-informed, decision-making framework that supports the goals of systemic schoolwide SEL. The addition of schoolwide SEL offers an opportunity to enhance or refine existing systems of support (CASEL, 2019). The vision of VTSS is to build capacity for a sustained tiered system of academic, behavioral, social, and emotional supports that are responsive to the needs of all students. VTSS functions under the anchor process of integrating data, practices, and systems to affect outcomes. Currently, 56 school divisions and 594 of Virginia schools are implementing VTSS. Here are some examples of how SEL can be integrated into the VTSS framework:

1. Build capacity of our VDOE/University Training and Technical Assistance (TTAC) Centers and Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS) state coaches to support SEL implementation.
2. Collaborate with VTSS state leadership to create recommendations for data-informed decision making around SEL (i.e., evidence-based practices and measuring outcomes).
3. Leverage the existing VTSS coaching structure to support SEL implementation at the division and school levels.

D. Fidelity and Sustainability of SEL implementation:

Schoolwide SEL implementation is driven by a process of continuous improvement. To be done effectively and sustainably, SEL must be implemented using continuous improvement approaches that allow schools and districts to learn from both their successes and challenges, adapting their approach along the way, and adjusting strategies as the needs of their stakeholders evolve (CASEL, 2019). At the core of VTSS is a problem-solving process that is informed by data. Divisions and schools need to understand the data points that are important for their school population and to identify what SEL growth looks like in their data. VTSS has a comprehensive assessment system that can be leveraged to measure SEL fidelity and growth outcomes. As part of VTSS data collection, schools that implement VTSS regularly complete fidelity checks on practices and measures used. Additionally, at the division level, leadership teams assess their capacity to build and sustain a tiered system of supports, which ultimately would support their efforts towards implementing SEL within a VTSS framework. This can inform divisions on their capacity to sustain efforts and assist schools with implementation as they work toward measurable outcomes. Here are some examples of how SEL can be implemented with fidelity and sustainability:

1. Collaborate with VTSS state leadership to create a fidelity tool to assess the use of SEL practices.
2. Provide guidance to divisions on human resource practices and policies that prioritize SEL. Several other states implement various human resource practices and policies to support SEL through the recruitment, hiring, support, compensation, promotion, and

retention of employees who prioritize social and emotional skills and competencies (Yoder et al., 2020).

3. Update SEL standards on a routine basis just as other standards are routinely updated.
4. Encourage Virginia colleges and universities with teaching programs to embed curriculum and instruction in SEL.

Recommendation 2

Allocate state funding to the VDOE for a dedicated full-time position to guide, support, and lead Social Emotional Learning (SEL) implementation throughout the state.

In order to meet recommendations A through D above, direct and intentional leadership at the state level is required. Many Virginia school divisions have allocated resources to provide division-level SEL leadership, and at least ten states have created or are creating a State Education Agency position to directly support SEL. **Kansas** has two specific positions related to SEL—an assistant director to social, emotional, and character development and a coordinator for social-emotional growth. **Delaware's** SEL position is housed in the Office of Innovation and Improvement in response to the state's governor signing Executive Order 24, making Delaware a trauma informed state and focusing on SEL as a universal coping tool and buffer to adversity. **Washington State's** funding comes from a legislated position, and **Indiana** has developed a full SEL Team (Yoder et al., 2020). This has become increasingly important as state educational agencies throughout the nation work to support local schools in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Just as other content areas have designated specialists at the state level, social emotional learning deserves equivalent attention and prioritization. The creation of such a position will demonstrate Virginia's commitment to the social emotional needs and development of our students. By creating this position, the VDOE would have the capacity to develop and provide resources to successfully support local school divisions with the implementation of a statewide SEL program.

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Appendix A: Legislative Authority

Item 137 (Paragraph T) of the *2021 Appropriation Act* (i.e., *Chapter 552*), 2021 Special Session I Acts of Assembly:

T). The Superintendent of Public Instruction shall convene a workgroup to make recommendations on the desired qualifications and training for school personnel providing health services in schools. The workgroup shall include at least: (i) three local school division representatives, including one superintendent; (ii) two members of a local school board; (iii) school personnel providing health services, including contracted personnel from a local health department, personnel with varying levels of nursing credentials, and personnel without nursing credentials; and (iv) two members of the Board of Education. The recommendations shall be submitted to the General Assembly no later than October 1, 2021. Such recommendations shall detail any necessary legislative or budgetary changes to implement the recommendations.

Appendix B: Workgroup Membership

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School Counselor
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Heather Board

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Roanoke County Public Schools

Karen Carlson

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Erika Boerger Daniel

Student Advancement Coordinator
Newport News City Public Schools

Tim Duncan

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Bristol County Public Schools

Patrick Farrell

Intervention and Support Specialist
Charlottesville City Public Schools

Karen Garlow

Supervisor of School Counseling Services and Student Records
Roanoke County Public Schools

Maria Genova

School Psychology Supervisor
Fairfax County Public Schools

Dr. Shameka Gerald

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Newport News City Public Schools

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Roanoke City Public Schools

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Justin Wallace

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Matthew Wallin

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Appomattox County Public Schools