

## West Hartford Public School District

<b>Agenda Item:</b>	Social Emotional Learning through an Equity Lens
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	October 14, 2021
<b>From:</b>	Dr. Roszena Haskins, Director of Equity Advancement
<b>Through:</b>	Tom Moore, Superintendent

This year WHPS has redoubled district-wide efforts to attend to the social and emotional needs of children and adults. All K-12 students are provided assured instructional experiences to develop effective social emotional learning skills in a classroom community setting. In our elementary schools, lessons are delivered during Morning Meeting. In our middle schools, lesson delivery takes place during Morning Advisory. A Community Block model provides a space for lesson delivery in our high schools. In each setting established routines are followed and adapted from the Center for Responsive Schools. This touchstone “allows for a predictable time for students and teachers alike to build community in the midst of uncertainty” (Center for Responsive Schools, 2020, p. i).

SEL instruction in our schools is grounded in the framework of the *Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)*. This framework provides a set of research-based competencies that educators and parents can model and teach as a way to develop the academic, social, and emotional skills that all students need to be successful in school and out of school. CASEL research asserts that the following SEL competencies are essential for life success:

1. **Self-awareness:** The abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts
2. **Responsible decision-making:** The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations
3. **Relationship skills:** The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups
4. **Social awareness:** The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts

CASEL acknowledges that “While SEL alone will not solve longstanding and deep-seated inequities in the education system, it can help schools to promote understanding, examine biases, reflect on and address the impact of racism...close opportunity gaps and create a more inclusive school community.” Essentially, SEL provides students with understandings and skills that they need to increase their social consciousness and act in ways that foster respect, empathy, fairness, and universal humanity. SEL instruction sits at the cross-section of prosocial education that fosters safe, positive, inclusive, equitable and supportive learning environments. Lessons draw upon the *Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors* metaphor coined by educator, author and scholar of multicultural education, Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop. WHPS teaches SEL through an equity lens, adapted from the *Learning for Justice* social justice and anti-bias framework. *Learning for Justice* contends that the following pro-social domains are critical for students to thrive within our diverse society:

1. **Identity:** Understanding the various characteristics that make up our sameness as well as uniqueness and how identity affects relationships within schools and classrooms
  - Mirrors: Offers reflections that foster development of positive self-concept
2. **Diversity:** Developing respectful and inclusive ways to discuss and interact across similarities and differences
  - Windows: Provides a view of diversity in race, ethnicity, language, cultures, family make-up, traditions, etc and promotes empathy where appropriate
3. **Justice:** Understanding how fairness, equity and equality can serve to recognize and counter bias, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination
  - Sliding Glass Doors: Offers teaching and learning about relating to people as individuals, rather than representative of groups. Fosters relationships and reflects figures, groups, events of social justice locally and globally

4. **Action:** Developing civic literacy skills that raise awareness of ways to make a difference, and builds confidence to advance social inclusion, fair treatment, equitable conditions and peaceful environments

Pro-social SEL lessons follow a progression adapted to student developmental levels. The district-created curriculum is informed by the educators, parents/caregivers and students of the West Hartford Public Schools. Lessons are implemented using multiple platforms through which students have opportunities for multi-modal participation including writing, typing, drawing, polls, and class discussions. The learning progression provided in this report outlines topics, themes and a brief summary of content across building levels. Student and educator feedback also informs this progression. Essential questions offer families one suggested way to support and extend learning at home through reflection and discussion.

**Elementary Morning Meeting**

At the elementary level, SEL/Civics lessons supplement our existing Pre-Kindergarten community-building approaches and K-5 *Second Step* curriculum which applies a flexible and holistic approach grounded in SEL. *Second Step* addresses: Skills for Learning, Empathy, Emotion Management, Problem-Solving. SEL instruction in the Morning Meeting Pre-K setting extends the curriculum with a developmental progression that focuses on: developing a positive self concept, identifying understanding and regulating emotions, and developing an understanding of rules and responsibilities within communities. New this year is a Gender Literacy progression embedded within the SEL/Civics Framework that focuses on identity and inclusion. This component was created in collaboration with the WHPS LGBTQ+ Alliance and elementary library media specialists. A collection of diverse mentor texts and videos representative of our local community and global society offer robust engagement, reading, writing, and discussion experiences. The following progression reflects excerpts from the K-2 SEL/Civics Curriculum and the Grades 3-5 SEL/Civics Curriculum, adapted by grade level and developmental readiness.

**Elementary SEL/Civics Framework**

Develop a Positive Self Concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Positive self characteristics, strengths, assets, limitations/challenges</li> <li>● Cultural characteristics, values, norms, traditions, etc.</li> <li>● New experiences and activities with confidence and optimism</li> <li>● Seeking help/self advocacy</li> </ul>
Identify, Understand and Regulate Emotions of Self and Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identify, recognize, appropriate label, compare and contrast thoughts, feelings and emotions</li> <li>● respond appropriately to their emotional state and with adult support, discuss how basic emotions impact behavior in self and others</li> <li>● With adult support, use basic strategies to manage intense or difficult feelings (e.g. deep breathing, take a break, etc.)</li> </ul>
Develop an Understanding of Rules and Responsibilities Within Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Understanding of school and classroom rules; importance of authority figures in the community and their role to keep us safe.</li> <li>● Names and follows basic safety rules, as well as norms related to privacy and personal boundaries</li> <li>● Recognize/acknowledge feelings, needs, and rights of others through behavior</li> <li>● Recognize and resolves conflict with peers in personal and familiar contexts and can articulate nature with adult modeling and support using simple strategies</li> </ul>
Develop Positive Interpersonal Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identify trusted adults and maintain healthy relationships with adults in the home, school and community.</li> <li>● With adult support, use basic social skills to ask to play or interact with others</li> <li>● With support, begin to establish and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships within the group setting</li> <li>● Engage in practices that contribute to community well-being</li> </ul>

**Middle School Morning Advisory**

SEL/Social Justice (SJ) lessons are implemented four times each month and provide adequate time and space for content delivery and application. The lessons are purposefully designed to foster greater student-to-student discussion and opportunities to share their lived experiences. Recent content shifts include adjustments to reflect the developmental differences inherent across the three grade levels. Further, lessons were developed to offer students consistent frames for reflecting upon the heritage and awareness months celebrated and recognized in the school. The frames seek to ensure that students see a balanced perspective which offers some historical and cultural context, ways to more deeply understand and empathize with those cultures, and means of honoring and celebrating these communities.

## Middle School SEL/SJ Progression

<p><b>Social-Emotional Learning: Why emotions matter.</b> Students will explore the value of understanding our emotions and of self-care strategies. Team and trust-building activities serve to foster a positive classroom community.</p>
<p><b>Establishing A Positive Space: Norms</b> Students will develop norms and clear expectations for how their Advisory can be a place where all students feel welcome, accepted, and safe to speak openly and learn from one another.</p>
<p><b>Oops &amp; Ouch</b> Students will learn about how we are all capable of saying or doing things inadvertently which can hurt the feelings of others. Students learn ways of letting others know they have felt uncomfortable or upset by something said or done by saying “Ouch” rather than remaining silent or becoming confrontational. The “Oops” concept offers a way to express regret to those unintentionally offended or hurt. Students are reminded that they may need help from adults in some cases and where to go for support.</p>
<p><b>Honoring and Celebrating Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month</b> Students will explore the cultures, peoples and history of those identifying as Hispanic-American. The lessons build understanding of the Hispanic/Latinx cultures and celebrate contributions of individuals and communities on American life.</p>
<p><b>Managing Emotions</b> Students will learn about how to recognize what typically triggers various emotions, how to recognize when they are experiencing those emotions, and some basic ways to manage emotions. The students will learn the STOP strategy ( S-Stop or pause, T-Take a breath, O-Observe what they are feeling, thinking, and experiencing, then to P-Proceed) using healthy and positive responses to the situation.</p>
<p><b>Brave Spaces/Identity</b> Students learn about the concept of a Brave Space as a learning environment that allows all individuals to engage with one another to have conversations about social issues with honesty, respect and sensitivity.</p>
<p><b>Finding Common Ground</b> Students continue to explore concepts associated with identity by examining how we share some aspects of identity with others while also possessing unique aspects of our identities.</p>
<p><b>Honoring and Celebrating Native American Heritage Month</b> Students examine the details of the first Thanksgiving in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the complexities of the tradition. A review of who some of the Native peoples were in CT and how we can honor these cultures and the Native American heritage today.</p>
<p><b>Home Culture</b> Students will explore how each of us comes from a unique home which helps share who we are. Aspects of what defines one’s home culture will be discussed. How does our home culture impact our identity? As students deepen their understanding of differences and how culture can affect both identity and serve to establish power in societies they will explore the concept of dominant culture.</p>
<p><b>Stereotypes/Stereotypes of Teenagers</b> Students will define the word stereotype and discuss what stereotypes are in our daily lives, why they exist, and how they can serve as barriers to truly knowing others. How stereotyping can be harmful is also examined.</p>

## High School Community Block

At the high school, Community teachers facilitate SEL and Social Justice (SJ) lessons and discussions for twenty-minutes weekly during the Community Block on Wednesdays. The first part of the Community SEL/SJ curriculum is designed to build positive relationships and foster a “one community” atmosphere in the classroom. Enhanced activities are also designed to honor and celebrate diversity. Attention to increase inclusion of heritage months is intended to authentically acknowledge and honor the narratives and lived experiences of individuals and communities of people.

## High School SEL/SJ Progression

**Building Community** Students will get to know each other, build community norms, set goals for the year. Students will learn about the purpose of Community sessions and get to know their Community members more. Students will set norms for how we will approach and discuss complex or challenging subjects and learn about self-care strategies for the year.

**Celebrating Latinx/Hispanic Heritage Month** Students will learn vocabulary terms related to the Hispanic community, the History of the Spanish language in the Americas, and explore successful Hispanic influencers in our society.

**Identity (LGBTQIA+ History month)** Students will learn about how we develop identity and the elements of their multiple identities. We'll talk about how our identities are shaped by our experiences and relationships and in turn how our multiple identities influence our experiences.

**Indigenous Populations in the World** Students will learn about the origin of Indigenous Peoples Day as well as how and why it is celebrated around the world. In the second lesson, students will analyze some commonly used phrases which have ties to Indigenous groups, with a focus on their true meaning.

**Veteran's Day** Students will develop an awareness of the sacrifice veterans make and learn about local Veterans.

**Indigenous Populations in CT** Students will explore the indigenous populations of Connecticut and the relationship we have with those populations today.

**Bias in the Media** Students will learn about bias, implicit bias, and confirmation bias. Students will analyze their own implicit biases and how to combat them. Students will also look at how the media uses different images and language to send subliminal messaging.

**Diversity** Students will identify what makes someone unique and how diversity can help broaden our awareness and strengthen relationships, creating greater social awareness and respect for others of diverse backgrounds and cultures.

### Black History Month Student-led Assembly and Debrief

**Cultural Awareness + Cultural Self Assessment** In the first session, students will learn the definition of culture and explore the "Iceberg" model of culture as well as the importance of being open to learning about cultural variation. In the second session students will complete a self assessment of various elements of their own culture and cultural practices. Students will consider how these elements of their culture influence their experience in the world.

**Microaggressions** Students will explore the forms, types, and themes of microaggressions, identify how they are harmful and learn how to respond to them and avoid causing them.

**Upstander vs. Bystander** Students will learn about the Bystander Effect and how to combat it. They will learn to use different strategies to be an upstander.

**Women's History Month** Students will recognize the achievements of women in history and the struggles and progress towards gender equality, including the need to eliminate violence against women and the on-going efforts to do so.

**National Deaf History Month/Black ASL** Students will learn about three turning points in deaf education history and will honor the achievements of people who are deaf and hard of hearing.

**Financial Literacy-** Students will learn about ways to advance equity and diversity through finance. This lesson focuses on the impact of financial literacy among young adults, especially those of underrepresented backgrounds, and a call to action for integrating life-long skills in order to make sound financial decisions.

**Asian, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month** Students will engage in a panel of West Hartford students and residents who are members of the AAPI community and are social justice advocates.

**Vision of a Graduate** The Vision of the Graduate articulates the community's and school district's aspirations for each student. By outlining the specific attitudes, dispositions and skills, the Vision of the Graduate identifies desired outcomes for students who graduate from the West Hartford Public Schools.

**Jewish American Heritage Month** Students will learn about the origins of Jewish American Heritage Month. They will then look at the local example of Rabbi Stanley Kessler's commitment to Civil Rights. Students will then use Kessler's example to think about the cross-section of identities working together for equity.

**Pride and Stonewall Extension** Students will review the history of the LGBTQ+ community and explore gender and identity expression.

**Self Care and Mental Health embedded into the Curriculum**

Students will identify the connection between self-awareness and social awareness to utilize self-care exercises, consider a self-care plan and a bucket list to support students' social and emotional learning.

Time and space built into our existing school structures will provide opportunities for educators to continue to reflect, review, and make recommendations for changes that will strengthen, extend or enhance our equity-focused SEL program. Educators, students, parents/caregivers, and other community stakeholders will continue to have channels to share their input and feedback.

Dr. Roszena Haskins, Dr. Scott Ratchford, Ms. Kim Ambrose, Ms. Gayle Campbell and high school students will be available for questions and discussion.