

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) WPL Truncated Report

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Problem of Practice

Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) seeks a better understanding of the social-emotional learning (SEL) practices currently operating across classrooms and campuses and a strategic vision for how SEL can enhance the district's focus on achieving academic excellence within a community where every individual is respected and belongs.

Recommendations

At a high level, the WPL team recommended LPS embark on three phases of work to address the district's problem of practice including:

1. Develop and implement the needs assessment process in partnership with an outside facilitator and a guiding coalition of key stakeholders to identify areas of strength and need within the district and individual schools.
2. Build upon existing data sources, in-house SEL champions and LPS core values to mobilize the community towards a shared understanding of the academic and relational benefits of SEL.
3. Utilize SEL implementation as the foundation for all of the other areas for improvement the district has identified.

SEL Needs Assessment

The district specifically framed the original problem to the team around the desire to conduct a needs assessment for social emotional learning. With that in mind, the WPL team honed in on recommendations for this specific step in their recommendations. First, the team encouraged LPS to ensure that the process of conducting a needs assessment illuminated:

- Existing programs and practices that your district can build upon;
- Gaps where new programs, practices, or policies may be needed; and
- Resources that may enable your district to maximize the impact of SEL.

In order to conduct its SEL needs assessment, the team recommended LPS take the following steps:

1. Find or hire a consultant as facilitator of the needs assessment process
2. Form a guiding coalition or SEL Task Force
3. Determine specific areas to assess and a timeline for completion
4. Collect information on existing SEL/SEL-related programs, practices, and policies
5. Summarize and share your results

Considerations for SEL Implementation

Knowing that the ultimate work will be to support more dynamic and cohesive social emotional supports across the district, the WPL team included overarching recommendations for future implementation efforts as well as a seven-step process for this work. The overarching recommendations included:

- SEL must be viewed as integral to the core values that LPS has identified for itself and, therefore, should be understood as a district-wide, whole-school, whole-community initiative.
- Create a culture where social-emotional learning opportunities are pervasive across the school environment including classrooms, social settings and beyond.
- Focus on adult learning, then student learning, then community learning.

The team noted that while SEL is a clear focus in the district's strategic plan, implementation has been sporadic and varies between the Lincoln and Hanscom campuses and also shows variability among classrooms within schools. Currently, there are at least five different SEL curricula or programs in use but a thorough inventory is necessary. It is important to develop a common understanding and language around SEL. The team

recommends LPS collaboratively develop its own definition as part of the needs assessment and broader process described herein; the framework for the district's SEL definition is already present in its core values and strategic plan. For the purpose of this report, the team used the following definition of SEL:

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, feel a sense of safety and belonging, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student and productive citizen.

The Process for the Implementation of a Social Emotional Learning Program

1. Develop Vision and Long-Term Plan
2. Adopt a Social Emotional Learning Curriculum
3. Engage Stakeholders Throughout Process
4. Develop SEL Learning Standards and Assessments
5. Design Professional Development Plan and Supports
6. Adults Model Social Emotional Learning Competence
7. Monitor Implementation and Student Outcomes

Throughout this process the WPL team encouraged LPS to keep the following necessary tasks in mind:

- Provide repeated opportunities to practice new skills and behaviors within the program structure and beyond to real-life situations.
- Support classroom teachers in integrating SE competency promotion into core subject areas (e.g., language arts and empathy skills; science experiments and the problem-solving framework) and using SEL instructional practices (e.g., cooperative learning, dialogic inquiry) so that SEL can become a part of routine classroom practice throughout the day.
- Seek out opportunities to integrate and reinforce the use of key SEL knowledge, skills, and concepts from the evidence-based SEL school program at home, through after-school programs, and in targeted supports and interventions provided by school staff or community providers.

Ultimately, the WPL team strongly encouraged the use of CASEL's approach and resources for the needs assessment as well as future initiative implementation.

