



Newton Public Schools
100 Walnut Street
Newton, MA 02460

Judy Levin-Charns, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
Mary Eich, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching & Learning

MEMORANDUM

To: David Fleishman
From: Judy Levin-Charns, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
Mary Eich, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching & Learning
Date: March 10, 2014
Re: Social and Emotional Learning

The accompanying report describes the foundations of our work on social and emotional learning in the Newton Public Schools. Over time, we have developed a structure that provides classroom-based social and emotional curriculum for all students, and additional supports for students who need more.

Suzanne Bouffard's recent article in the *Harvard Education Letter*, "Making School a Calmer Place to Learn," supplements our report with a broader discussion of Social and Emotional Learning across the country.

In our presentation to the School Committee on Thursday, March 13, we will take a closer look at some of our programming, and discuss possible next steps.

Newton Public Schools and Social Emotional Learning: A Leveled Approach to Addressing the Social and Emotional Development and Needs of Our Students

Legislation and Regulations

In 2010, the Massachusetts legislature responded to concerns about bullying in schools with the passage of Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010: *An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools*.¹ The legislation included a requirement for social and emotional learning:

SECTION 16. *The department of elementary and secondary education shall publish guidelines for the implementation of social and emotional learning curricula in kindergarten to grade 12, inclusive, on or before June 30, 2011. The guidelines shall be updated biennially. For purposes of this section, social and emotional learning shall mean the processes by which children acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to recognize and manage their emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions and constructively handle challenging social situations.*

As requested, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) developed “Guidelines on Implementing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Curricula.”² with an opening statement that grounds the document in both behavior and academic outcomes.

“Developing students’ social and emotional competencies helps schools create safe learning environments that contribute to academic achievement for all.”

The Guidelines make extensive use of materials developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which describes itself as “the nation’s leading organization advancing the development of academic, social and emotional competence for all students.”³

The goals of the DESE Guidelines mirror the five cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies identified by CASEL:

- Self-Awareness focuses on identifying and recognizing emotions; accurate self-perception; strengths, needs, and values; and self-efficacy.
- Self-Management includes impulse control and stress management; self-motivation and discipline; goal setting; and organizational skills.
- Social Awareness addresses perspective taking; empathy; difference recognition; and respect for others.

¹ <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2010/Chapter92>

² <http://www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/SELguide.pdf>

³ <https://casel.squarespace.com/>

- Relationship Skills encompasses communication; social engagement and relationship building; working cooperatively; negotiation; refusal; conflict management; and help seeking.
- Responsible Decision Making includes problem identification and situation analysis; problem solving; evaluation and reflection; and personal, social, and ethical responsibility.

The legislation required school systems to choose evidence-based curricula starting in pre-school and continuing through high school, with a minimum of eight lessons per year. We identified programs that both met the bullying-prevention requirements of Chapter 92 and were consistent with our priorities and practices in the broader arena of social and emotional learning. Our PEP (Carol M. White Physical Education Program) grant allowed the time and resources for teachers to be trained in newly identified programs.

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| Elementary: Grades K-2 | Open Circle |
| Elementary: Grades 3-5 | Steps to Respect |
| Middle School: Grades 6 – 8 | Second Step |
| High School: Grades 9 - 12 | Michigan Model for Health ⁴ |

Descriptions of these programs can be found in Appendix A.

Social and Emotional Learning in Newton Public Schools

While the legislation was new in 2010, the work of teaching of social and emotional skills to students in the Newton Public Schools was not. Many of our elementary teachers had been trained in Open Circle, a social and emotional curriculum developed at Wellesley College beginning in 1987. Many Newton educators understood the educational value of developing a classroom environment in which students respected one another. In addition, our guidance and Special Education departments provided supports to students with social or emotional needs. The legislation supported the importance of our existing work, and provided support and resources to enhance and improve curriculum and services.

Today, our social and emotional learning program has four levels of implementation:

- curriculum and programming for all students through classroom instruction
- intervention for small groups of students based on identified needs
- intervention for individual students based on identified needs
- community partnerships

⁴ Student response to the Michigan Model was not positive, and after the first year of implementation, high school staff began investigating other options.

Curriculum is delivered by classroom teachers in elementary schools and by health teachers in secondary schools. In addition to the curricula identified above, many of our elementary teachers have been trained in Responsive Classroom, also described in Appendix A.

Intervention for small groups of students can take many forms. Often a guidance counselor or social worker will invite a few students to eat lunch in his or her office, an opportunity for informal socializing among students, and for the adult to facilitate interaction, provide social cues and time for reflection. Other groups may be formed in response to shared need, for example students whose parents are divorcing.

Intervention for individual students has many forms. A temporary stressful situation may trigger a few targeted meetings, or a student's classroom behavior may require more intensive intervention for the student, the teacher(s) and other student in the classroom.

Some students need more intensive support through specialized programs. Our stabilization programs – Elementary (ESP), Middle (MSP), and High (HSP), plus Springboard, are regular education 45 school-day programs, originally designed to be off-campus placements for students in crisis. They operate under the direction of the Office of Student Services.

Until this year, the Elementary Stabilization Program (ESP) was a separate classroom, located most recently at Franklin Elementary School, serving students in crisis with a teacher, special educator, counselor, and often an aide. This year, ESP has “gone mobile”, supporting students in crisis by bringing the ESP staff to the home school. This model allows for intensive and targeted professional development in the students' regular education classroom while working with the student in crisis. Student stability and success has improved significantly due to contact with the home school staff who can remain with the student throughout the intervention.

The Middle School Stabilization Program (MSP) staff includes a social worker, special education teacher, regular education teacher, and behavior therapist. MSP provides interventions that can be implemented at the student's home school or at our 45-day stabilization program located on the campus of the Education Center. Consultation to middle school staff for intermediate interventions are also available.

The High School Stabilization Program (HSP) is located across the street from Newton South High School. HSP staff includes a guidance counselor, special education teacher, teaching assistant, and tutors in the content areas of math, science, and world language (as needed). Content tutors, added last year, and consistent communication with the students' teachers, give students the opportunity to stay enrolled in their classes at North and South high schools.

An additional option for high school students is Springboard, located in the

Education Center. The Springboard program is designed for high school students who are in transition from schools, hospitals, home instruction, and/or day treatment programming back into Newton Public Schools. The program provides students with additional support, supervision, and guidance in a smaller setting while they continue working on academics. The staff includes a guidance counselor, two regular education teachers, part time teachers in the content areas of math and science, and two teaching assistants.

In addition to our school-based curricula and programs, Newton students benefit from our *community partnerships* – city departments and agencies with whom we collaborate to make additional services and supports available to students and their families.

Progress monitoring

All of the curricula in use at elementary and middle schools have program-based assessments which monitor student learning. Perhaps more informative, though is the longitudinal data available through the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

The *Summary of Results* from the most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey can be found on the School Committee website (Major Reports, September 23, 2013).

<http://www3.newton.k12.ma.us/schoolcommittee/majorreports>

Appendix A: Curriculum and Program Descriptions

Open Circle

<http://www.open-circle.org/>

Developer: Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College.

Grades: Elementary K-2

Delivery model: Classroom teachers

Training model: Open Circle trainers provide a four-day workshop and on-site coaching for new teachers.

Progress Monitoring: Assessment and outcome measurement tools provided

Self-description:

Open Circle is a leading provider of evidence-based curriculum and professional development for social and emotional learning (SEL) in Kindergarten through Grade 5. Since its inception in 1987, Open Circle has reached over **two million children** and trained more than **13,000 educators**. Open Circle is currently used in over 300 schools in more than 100 urban, suburban and rural communities across the United States.

Open Circle is a universal SEL program focused on two goals:

- Strengthening students' SEL skills related to recognizing and managing emotions, developing care and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively
- Fostering safe, caring and highly-engaging classroom and school communities

At the heart of Open Circle are 15-to-20 minute classroom meetings led by teachers twice per week throughout the school year. These interactive meetings include group discussions, role-playing, literature, and community-building activities. Students learn and practice important SEL skills such as listening, cooperating, speaking up, calming down, expressing anger appropriately, recognizing dangerous and destructive behavior, and problem solving. Lessons are then reinforced throughout the school day and beyond by teachers, administrators, school support staff and parents.

Steps to Respect

www.cfchildren.org/steps-to-respect.aspx

Developer: Committee for Children

Grades: Grades 3 - 5

Delivery model: Classroom teachers

Training model: 20 teachers trained as trainers in 2008 through PEP grant now act as on-site trainers in each building.

Progress Monitoring: Surveys and assessments provided

Self-description:

The *Steps to Respect* program works on a school-wide level. That means it starts with administrators taking stock of their bullying policies and procedures and creating a baseline using surveys and existing data to track progress. Next, all adults in the school—from bus drivers to cafeteria workers to teachers—are trained in recognizing and dealing with bullying. Once this groundwork is laid, the classroom lessons can begin—and kids learn how to make friends; recognize feelings; and recognize, refuse, and report bullying. We can **train adults** to respond to bullying quickly and effectively. When adults lead anti-bullying efforts in schools, the results are reductions in bullying and more positive student attitudes toward school, increased student willingness to seek help, and less tolerant attitudes toward bullying.

We can teach **friendship skills** to lessen both the likelihood of victimization and its impact. Studies show that students who have at least one friend are less likely to be bullied, and when they are, those who have a good friend have fewer behavioral problems as a result. We can teach **social skills** so that students know how to respond to bullying. If students are passive, they are more likely to be a target of bullying, but if they are aggressive, the bullying can escalate. The middle ground is being assertive by standing up for themselves and their peers.

We can teach **responsible bystander skills** so that bullying is not encouraged. Since children look to others for how to respond to bullying, their peers' reactions can make or break a bullying situation. Stand around and watch or laugh, and the bullying is prolonged; intervene appropriately, and the bullying tends to stop.

Second Step

www.cfchildren.org/

Developer: Committee for Children

Grades: Middle School Grades 6 – 8

Delivery model: Health teachers

Training model: Health teachers trained

Progress Monitoring: Surveys and assessments provided

Self-description:

The *Second Step* program ... features developmentally appropriate ways to teach core social-emotional skills such as empathy, emotion management, and problem solving.

The [middle school] program teaches empathy and communication, emotion-management and coping skills, and decision-making. These skills help students stay engaged in school, make good choices, set goals, and avoid peer pressure, substance abuse, bullying, and cyber bullying.

New middle schoolers [sixth graders] start by learning to work in groups, then move on to such topics as recognizing bullying and identifying hopes and plans. Videos guide students through important skills, such as recognizing and dealing with strong emotions, and class discussions and skill practices help them try out communication and problem-solving skills.

Seventh-graders learn about cyber bullying, sexual harassment, and coping with stress. They move on to myths and facts about drugs and alcohol, and through skill practice, group work, and class discussion they learn to make good decisions. Engaging video vignettes and colorful posters keep the material fresh, while Home Links reinforce skills and help open the lines of communication between school and home.

Eighth-graders wrap up their middle school years and prepare for high school with lessons about handling grievances and avoiding labels, stereotypes and prejudice, and bullying in dating relationships. Group work, class discussion, and classroom videos help them learn about goal setting and keeping commitments—key factors in substance abuse prevention.

Michigan Model for Health

<http://www.emc.cmich.edu/mm/>

Developer: Central Michigan University

Grades: High School Grades 9 – 12

Delivery model: Health teachers

Training model: Health Teachers Trained

Self-description:

The *Michigan Model for Health*® is a comprehensive and sequential K-12 health education curriculum that aims to give school-aged children (ages 5-19 years) the knowledge and skills needed to practice and maintain healthy behaviors and lifestyles. It provides age-appropriate lessons addressing the most serious health challenges facing school-aged children, including social and emotional health; nutrition and physical activity; alcohol, tobacco and other drugs; personal health and wellness; safety; and HIV. The *Michigan Model for Health* facilitates learning through a variety of interactive teaching and learning techniques. Skill development through demonstration and guided practice is emphasized resulting in the development of positive lifestyle behaviors for students and families.

The *Michigan Model for Health* is based on the Adapted Health Belief Model, a merging of several behavior change theories including the Social Cognitive Theory, Social Influence Theory, and Social Behavioral Theory. A key principle of the Adapted Health Belief Model is that a health education program is more likely to impact behavior change if it includes all of the following components: knowledge, skills, self-efficacy, and environmental support. The *Michigan Model for Health* is designed for implementation as a component of the core school curriculum, with each of the lessons lasting 20-45 minutes in length. The lessons may be integrated in various disciplines such as language arts, science, social studies, etc. Furthermore, some lessons include activities to facilitate parental and family involvement beyond the classroom. The curriculum can be implemented in public, private, or alternative schools.

Responsive Classroom

<https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/>

Developer: Northeast Foundation for Children

Grades: Elementary K-5

Delivery model: Integrated into classroom instruction

Training model: Classroom teachers trained in a 4-day summer course

Self-description:

Responsive Classroom is a research- and evidence-based approach to elementary education that leads to greater teacher effectiveness, higher student achievement, and improved school climate.

Responsive Classroom practices help educators become more effective in three key domains—each of which enables and enriches the others:

Engaging Academics

Teachers create learning tasks that are active, interactive, appropriately challenging, purposeful, and connected to students' interests.

Positive Community

Teachers nurture a sense of belonging, significance, and emotional safety so that students feel comfortable taking risks and working with a variety of peers.

Effective Management

Teachers create a calm, orderly environment that promotes autonomy and allows students to focus on learning.