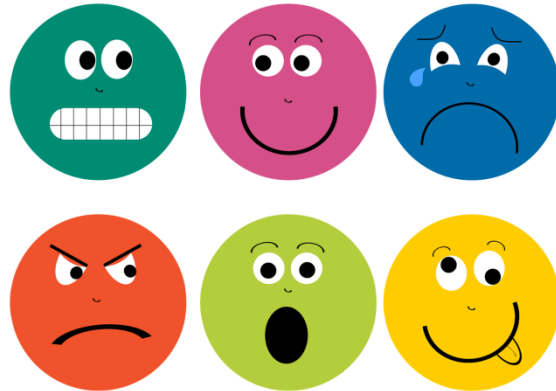


# Social Emotional Learning



## Inventory and Needs Assessment

for the  
**Milton Public School System**

**Produced by Laurie Stillman, MHSM**

**District SEL Facilitator**

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## Overview

There is growing appreciation in the Milton Public School System (MPS) for how the psychological, social, and physical wellbeing of students is integral to academic achievement. Known as “Social Emotional Learning” (SEL), this field takes a “whole child” approach to student education, within a safe and supportive “whole school” environment. SEL is also being accorded greater policy and practice attention at the national, state and district levels. Indeed, one of the Massachusetts Department of Early and Secondary Education’s (DESE) five strategic goals is to promote SEL in local districts across the state. DESE is also supporting a new organization of Massachusetts (MA) school leadership associations called, *Excellence in Social Emotional Learning (exSEL)*. They are also expected to release K-12 SEL guidance for MA school districts in the near future.

Until more recently, SEL has been directed primarily to the younger student population, especially to the preschool and early elementary grades. This has historically been true at MPS as well. But as adolescent brain science has evolved, with a growing understanding about how SEL competencies impact academic learning and can be cultivated over the life span, the importance of addressing SEL K-12 is becoming more well understood. However the practice, especially at the upper grade levels, is still evolving.

In an effort to work more intentionally to support the emotional intelligence and social capabilities of its students over the coming years, the MPS administration hired a District SEL Facilitator consultant. As part of her duties, she was requested to produce an inventory of SEL activities that currently exist across the district, as well as conduct a Needs Assessment to inform the development of an SEL Action Plan for the future.

This document contains an “SEL Inventory” (Appendix A) that catalogues the impressive work already being adopted across the district. In addition, through faculty interviews, examining existing school based assessments and reviewing best practices, a “Needs Assessment” was conducted. The central findings were synthesized and are presented herein. Finally, some observations and recommendations have been offered by the District SEL Facilitator at the report’s conclusion.

## I. Social Emotional Learning Primer

School professionals understand that strong academic preparation is critical for college and career readiness. But in our global dynamic society, plenty of research indicates that social, emotional and physical wellness is of critical importance as well.

*Emotion, thinking and learning are inseparable. Emotion is the rudder for thought and key to memory.*  
-Annenberg Learner

While attention to academic content and outcomes is an expected role for schools, promoting student SEL competencies are now also becoming a necessary feature of school offerings. These are vital “life skills” that, in combination with providing safe and supportive school and home environments, are necessary to improve school performance and life outcomes for students.

### **Wide-Ranging Benefits of Successful SEL Programs**

- **Improvements in Academic Performance by 11% on average**
- **Greater job satisfaction experienced by faculty**
- **Improved student mental health and fewer crisis episodes**
- **Increased student employability and employer satisfaction**
- **Improved life prospects for low income and other disadvantaged students**
- **A stronger democracy where civic engagement is valued**
- **An \$11 return on investment for every dollar invested in SEL**

From a school-based perspective, SEL competencies can be organized into four major buckets:

1. **Character Development**. There are many aspects to building character in children. Key traits such as honesty, trustworthiness, self-discipline, respectfulness, and kindness can be taught and inspired. Other traits include being empathetic and able to appreciate human differences. Additionally, responsible decision-making in the face of peer pressure and a penchant for risk-taking is essential for safe and healthy youth development.

2. **Emotional Grounding.** There are many things that can be done to support resilience in youth such as an ability to cope successfully with adversity, seek out help when emotional problems arise, as well as be self-aware of feelings and managing those feelings in a healthy way. Schools that are equipped to appropriately respond to behavioral health problems and mental illness can save lives and improve outcomes. In addition, self-regulation and executive function skills are highly desirable, especially while the adolescent brain is still maturing in these areas.
3. **Social Relationships-** Being able to work and play collaboratively, respectfully and productively with others, and communicate well, are student behaviors that can enrich families, friendships, work, and society. Promoting respect and appreciation for diversity are key social goals for a school community; after all, students’ formative exposures to racial, cultural and economic diversity, as well as intellectual and physical abilities, happen initially and primarily at school. Nurturing tolerance and social inclusion ought to be promoted.
4. **Safe and Supportive School and Living Environments.** A safe school climate, where students feel welcomed, supported, respected and appreciated works hand in hand with social and emotional learning. Importantly, reducing the stigma and negative responses to mental illness and substance addiction are important aspects of creating a school climate where help can be sought. Creating school-home-community partnerships where everyone is working together to provide the information, messages, environments, policies and supports needed to raise resilient children is vital for success. Approaches should be culturally competent.

*Meaningfully engaging students as leaders and problem solvers is part and parcel of an effective effort to improve upon school climate and culture.*

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is the preeminent nationwide organization that has helped to define the SEL field. Their SEL Wheel below summarizes the competencies involved in social and emotional learning.



### ***SEL Planning***

When planning to incorporate new SEL strategies within the educational system, the most effective programs are integrated into the culture, curricula, values, policies and teaching styles across the district and then reinforced at home and supported by the community. For successful implementation, decision-making should become a shared responsibility that is team driven and inclusive.

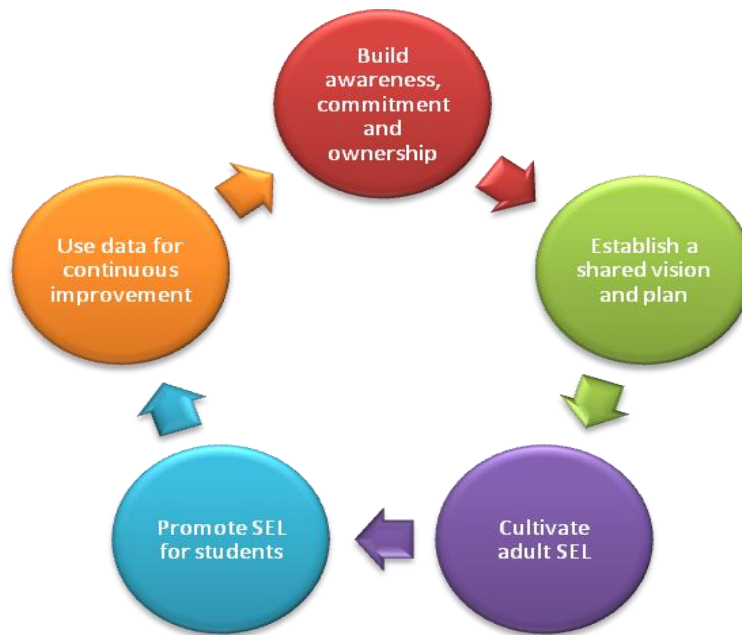
SEL planning must be thought of holistically, addressing the entire school community. Further, attending to the emotional and physical health of faculty and staff is an important feature of a school that successfully imparts SEL competencies to its students. After all, if teachers behave in stressful, unhealthy ways with their students, they can't possibly be effective SEL role models. Faculty also need to understand that an investment in SEL will likely result in their work becoming more pleasurable and effective.

There are essentially four levels of planning to address SEL in schools:

- In the **community**, engaging families and partnering with community organizations

- In the **district** with schoolwide supports, assessments and policies.
- In the **schools**, by creating a welcoming, safe and supportive environment
- In the **classrooms** through culturally relevant instruction, student participation and practice, and adult modeling

### **District Administration Role in Promoting SEL**



There are a number of resources, professional organizations, curricula and consultants that can help Milton in this journey. To that end, a [Compendium of SEL Resources](#) has been developed by the SEL District Facilitator.

## **II. Needs Assessment Methodology**

Between April and June 2017, the District SEL Facilitator interviewed MPS leaders to:

- gauge knowledge and beliefs about SEL practices
- better understand the extent of interest in moving an SEL agenda forward

- raise awareness about the field
- inventory SEL practices that have already been undertaken
- gather perceptions about critical needs and promising opportunities
- collect ideas and recommendations for future SEL policies, practices and programs

Those MPS staff interviewed include:

1. **James Jette**, Principal and **Karen Cahill**, Guidance Department Director  
Milton High School
2. **Dr. Karen Spaulding**, Principal  
Pierce Middle School
3. **Dr. Elaine McNeil-Germai**, Principal with **Ramsey Cadet** and **Bernadette Butler**  
Tucker Elementary School
4. **Karen McDavitt**, Principal  
Glover Elementary School
5. **Jon Redden** and **Holly Concannon**, Principals with **Elizabeth Caruso**, Adjustment  
Counselor  
Cunningham and Collicot Elementary Schools
6. **Margaret Gibbons**  
Director of School Nursing
7. **Catherine DesRoche**, **Amy Gale** and **Meredith Kempf**  
Elementary Curriculum Coordinators
8. **Tracy Grandeau**, Director with 8 **Adjustment Counselors** from across the system  
Special Education and Counseling
9. **Marti O’Keefe McKenna**  
Family Outreach Liaison
10. **Ada Rosmarin**  
School Committee Member and Early Childhood Consultant
11. **Noel Vigue**  
Director of Physical and Health Education

The SEL Facilitator utilized a semi-structured interview format, containing eight interview questions. The findings from these conversations were synthesized. Those themes that were repeatedly surfaced are summarized and presented below.

### III. District SEL Findings

#### *Strengths and Assets*



There are many formal and informal SEL activities taking place across the district, K-12, to promote the social and emotional intelligence of students as well as to foster safe and supportive schools. These are especially embedded at the elementary and preschool levels for all children, and tailored for students with special needs. SEL strategies are also being adopted more frequently in the older grades. Enhancing school-family-community partnerships is an evident growing priority across the system. While some of these initiatives are not necessarily referred to as SEL—they are, all the same, consistent with the *whole child* SEL approach and a valued component of the MPS educational experience.

School leadership, and those staff who were interviewed, are generally knowledgeable and very supportive of the concepts behind SEL. They yearn for more practical information, guidance and resources for implementing and promoting programs within the district and in classrooms. They state that many, but not all, faculty are also eager to learn more. To move the district’s SEL objectives forward in a more intentional manner, the administration engaged an SEL District Facilitator on a temporary basis, with hopes of finding resources to create a permanent position.

An in-depth Inventory of existing SEL initiatives can be found in Appendix A, grouped by SEL strategies. While the list may not capture every initiative, it generally enumerates the important ones. Some of the more significant overall interview findings include:

- **Behavioral Health Services-** Adjustment Counselors across the district are universally recognized as extremely competent and hard-working as they endeavor to address the many social and emotional needs of students. The superintendent has engaged a clinical expert to meet monthly with them to provide clinical support. Guidance Counselors and School Nurses are also attuned to mental health issues, and trained in *Mental Health First Aid*, an 8-hour course that teaches participants how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. There are “Behavioral Health” or “Student Support” Teams in all Milton schools, a multi-disciplinary group which regularly meets to review the needs of struggling students. The Tucker school uses aspects of the Multi-Tier System of

Supports Behavioral Health Framework (PBIS) for addressing their students' needs. There are also special programs for students at the middle and high school who are struggling socially or emotionally, such as lunch group at Pierce and the *Take Five Room* for high school students needing to "cool out". All elementaries and Pierce use CALM, a de-escalation approach overseen by the Pupil Personnel Services Department. The MHS Guidance Department recently established a program to introduce students to support services and provide them with the skills to help manage common stressors, after high school PE/Health staff conducted a student needs assessment within their mental health unit.

➤ **School Climate**- Most faculty believe that there is a positive school climate in all of our schools. (But without student school climate assessments to document this belief, we cannot be certain.)

All of the elementary schools employ a variety of creative strategies for addressing school culture/climate, such as observing Kindness Month. Some strategies are specifically focused on promoting diversity and inclusion. There has also been quite a bit of planning and PD around cultural competency. *However the program strategies differ among the four schools.*

The Pierce has established a We are Pierce teacher leader team to proactively address school climate in middle school.

At Milton High School, students feel relatively safe at school compared to their counterparts across the state, according to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). A Freshman Seminar familiarizes students with the academic, support and social resources available to them to help make their high school experience a successful one.

The district sponsors a Staff of Color Dialogue Group. This affinity group meets for the purpose of engaging in meaningful dialogue about cultural experiences, what a diverse faculty brings to MPS, and Milton's efforts to recruit and retain a diverse faculty that is reflective of the student body.

The Superintendent is hiring a consultant from Yale University to address the social transitions between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, to promote more inclusion during this critical period of change.

➤ **Curricula-** There are a number of evidence based skills-building curricula that have been recently implemented in the elementary and middle schools aimed at building character as well as social and personal responsibility. The Integrated Pre-School has an innovative SEL curriculum. The Second Step Program, a new PreK-8 SEL curriculum implemented at the elementary schools, is universally well-received. It gives faculty a “common language and set of strategies” to focus on.

The Pierce Middle School has adopted two very strong curricula to address the myriad health and emotional aspects of adolescence: The Michigan Model (health) and Get Real (Sexual and Personal Health) are in place. Aspects of the Botvin Life Skills (decision making and substance use prevention) will be implemented in the near future. In addition, the Pierce is teaming up with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to offer a World Of Difference Peer Leadership Program, to promote social responsibility and inclusion. Another Peer Leadership program at Pierce continues with DOVE to help foster healthy relationships.

Finally, the high school has a unit on mental health, violence prevention, physical and nutritional health, as well as Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs (ATOD) education. MHS also has a growing relationship with DOVE, to prevent abusive relationships, and to foster peer leaders through the organization.

➤ **School-Home-Community Connections-** There are some innovative programs that exist to strengthen family-school relationships. The Family Outreach Liaison, a special position established in the School Committee’s Advancement Budget, aims to assist families address their socio-economic needs and welcomes all new families into the system and during kindergarten screenings. There is also an innovative Home-Visiting Program for preschool and kindergartener families. Provided by teachers, the home visits serve as a means for establishing stronger bonds between families and

school, and identifying those who may need extra supports. Tucker, Glover and Collicot have used the professional organization 1647 to guide these efforts.

The superintendent and school principals regularly communicate with parents via email.

The superintendent's very comprehensive email blast, which is disseminated to the entire school community, includes a section on SEL.

A new parenting educational series entitled, *Promoting Awareness and Resources for the Emotional Nurturing of Teens (PARENT)*, is being planned for next year, supported by a grant from Milton BID Hospital. Many of the PTOs also sponsor innovative programs for families at each of the schools with the goal of scaffolding the school community. Additionally, the School Resource Officers (SROs) help to support troubled or acting-out youth and their families, imbue a sense of safety, and foster more trusting relationships between the police and students.

The MHS Community Service Program was developed in order to instill in all students a sense of citizenship. Each student is required to fulfill 35 hours of active service to the community each year in order to graduate.

Finally, there are some important family-community partnerships that have been cultivated. For example, there is active involvement with the Milton Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition, with the Director of Physical and Health Education serving on their steering committee. A long-standing relationship with notable clinician Maria Trozzi at Boston Medical Center has served to support the system as crises arise. And the Milton Interfaith Clergy Association has supported the schools when *hate* incidents occasionally arise- to mention just a few. In addition, there are a number of parent/community groups that are supportive of SEL goals such as FAVA, FAME, the Boosters and Citizens for a Diverse Milton.

➤ **Students with Special Needs-** Many faculty expressed that there are sufficient programs tailored for high risk and other children with special needs who struggle with social relationships (Tier 3). For instance, there is a mentoring program for academically high-risk 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders at Tucker. The STEP program at Glover serves children with different social/emotional issues, helping them with social skills, and there is a Self-

Management Learning Center at Pierce to better capture the support provided to students with social/emotional special needs. There are also student groups at the middle and high schools to help support those who may be struggling with social relationships or academics. Notably, an Alternative Education Program was established at MHS to motivate upper level academically at risk students to complete their education through small classes and a variety of specialized experiences, e.g., work study, on-line classes and community service.

➤ **SEL Assessments-** There are a number of student, faculty and climate assessments being implemented across the schools, however not in a coordinated fashion. For example, at the Glover, a comprehensive school climate survey was recently conducted by the principal, surveying students, faculty and parents. The Tucker School conducted a faculty survey on their perceptions of how well things are working at the school, as well as an informal survey of fourth and fifth high risk students about their perceptions of existing barriers to participation in community sports leagues. At Collicot, fifth graders took a “Minute Survey” with the adjustment counselor and in Cunningham, a cultural diversity survey was given to parents.

In the middle school, the Youth Health Survey was administered to mostly 7<sup>th</sup> graders two years ago and was given to 8<sup>th</sup> graders this past Spring. The Pierce principal also intends to conduct a school climate survey in the fall. At the high school, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey was administered two years ago to a sample of high schoolers in all grades, and provided important insights into student wellbeing. The results demonstrated that while Milton high school students fare well on most social and health indicators compared with their state high school counterparts, Milton students’ use of substances and reports of depression were higher. These results are what helped to prompt greater attention to SEL. In addition, Group Guidance Department sessions include a student survey of upper classmen that now includes some validated SEL questions.

All of the schools have engaged in an important Behavioral Health in Public Schools (BHPS) assessment, to help identify the district’s and each school’s behavioral health

needs and to promote safe and supportive schools. The impetus was a DESE grant written Dr. Karen Spaulding for Pierce, Glover and the District. All of the schools will have completed their BHPS Action Plans in the near future.

Finally, in the school health realm, next year the School Nursing Department will be mandated to implement Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) in one grade in middle school and one grade at high school. This validated assessment tool is required of MA public schools to identify students who may be struggling with mental health and/or substances. A planning meeting with the MA Department of Public Health was held this summer, coordinated by the Director of School Nursing. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades were selected by the middle and high school principals to be screened by SBIRT in the 2017-2018 school year, and screeners will be trained on using the SBIRT tool in the near future.

The Director of the Physical and Health Education Department is utilized the federal CDC's Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (HECAT) to gauge where MPS stands vis-à-vis national standards. The Director of Health and Physical Education is strongly committed to providing a robust skills-based SEL experience for students.

**Health Promotion-** A Health and Wellness Committee, with representatives across the system, meets regularly to discuss the health status of students and faculty. It is chaired by school committee volunteers.

The district's Food Service Department is known for its excellent attention to promoting high-quality nutrition and providing flavorful culinary options at the schools' cafeterias and beyond. It is a model program and its director, Jackie Morgan, has been ambitious about seeking out grants and educational opportunities to ensure that our children are properly nourished and satisfied with the healthful offerings.

In addition, there is the Wildcats Wellness Center, funded by the Milton Foundation for Education in 2016, which offers exercise equipment and is available to students and faculty alike.

## ***Needs, Gaps and Challenges***

While there is an impressive array of SEL opportunities being provided across the district, there are still many ways to enhance MPS SEL offerings in a more systematic, integrated fashion. The following list summarizes the primary needs, gaps and challenges identified during the assessment interviews.

**\*\*Overall Observations.** While there are a variety of SEL activities across the district, the system needs a coherent, vertical strategy for prioritizing, implementing, and assessing SEL competencies. Many of the best ideas are not being replicated -especially at the elementary level. The system would benefit by a more standardized, consistent approach where best practices are promoted and integrated into everyday teaching methods, and monitored through appropriate data collection methods.

Further, it would behoove the system to be clear about which SEL competencies it wants students to acquire PreK-12, and then to develop indicators for evaluation. Specifically, it would be valuable to articulate the SEL learning objectives/standards desired at each grade or school level to achieve them- as is done for academic subjects. After all, it is difficult to know what SEL skills are being conferred if they are not specified or measured. The same is true of school climate goals.

Additionally, because behavioral health crises dominate administrators' and adjustment counselors' time, there is a dearth of *prevention programs* generally available to benefit Tier 1 students to help build character and foster improved school climates.

**\*\*Professional development (PD) opportunities is the number one SEL need expressed by interviewees.** There is a desire by both administrators and faculty to learn practical classroom SEL strategies, as their orientation and training are often skills-based.

*SEL strategies extend beyond the more traditional conveyance of information and skills. It requires a culture shift, practice and modeling.*

PD should focus on improving classroom practice in all subjects, with a focus on enhancing character development and collaboration, as well as school climate. *Further, PD that helps*

*teachers, adjustment counselors, nurses and others more effectively respond to the significant mental health, traumatic, and behavioral issues experienced by children and families is strongly desired.*

Many expressed that teachers do not fully understand the potential benefits of SEL, and view it as an “add-on” responsibility which they simply don’t have the wherewithal to teach. PD could be used to help faculty *understand the benefits of SEL to their work*, such as how it might actually *reduce* their workload while *improving* classroom environments, student performance, and job satisfaction.

**\*\*Behavioral health is a critical need.** Interviewees expressed that there is insufficient staffing capacity to handle all of the mental health and social issues experienced by children and families. *Administrators and Adjustment Counselors are spending too much time and energy handling psychological emergencies, school anxiety, and poorly-functioning families.* This is taking them away from their essential duties, contributing to burnout, and preventing the system from adopting more proactive SEL interventions that could benefit all students. Because their time is spent largely attending to Tier 2 and Tier 3 students, *Tier 1 students’ SEL needs are being neglected.* The need for more Adjustment Counselors and Clinical Staff to help handle crises across the system, such as licensed clinical social workers or psychologists, are urgently needed. Despite the appreciated override this year that allowed the schools to bring on a half-time additional Adjustment Counselor, the student/counselor ratio was so inadequate prior to the override that the additional capacity still leaves the system short. *The Massachusetts school system average ratio is 1 counselor to 419 children. (ASCA 2013-2014) In Milton, with 8.5 FTE Adjustment Counselors, there is still only 1 counselor to every 470 students.*

In addition, the continuum of behavioral health services offered students from within and outside the system could benefit by being more developed and standardized—and regularly updated. *Policies, resources, protocols, and expectations vary from school to school.*

Further, there is a tension between wanting students to know they can receive help regarding their substance use problems, and the punitive consequences if discovered they



are using. These policies need to be revisited and articulated more clearly, and the stigma of requesting help diffused. Coaches need more training, and the high school “chemical awareness” program needs to be updated.

**\*\*Fostering Social Relationships and Tolerance needs to be attended to more robustly.**

The two areas of need that surfaced most frequently in the social skills realm include improving recess and needing more programs that teach tolerance. One of the most important places where children learn lessons of inclusion, kindness and collaboration, and conversely where conflict and bullying arise, are the places where youth are playing together. Playground Para Professionals are entrusted to oversee these important relationships, but only one school provides them with the supervision and professional development needed to perform their jobs well. Providing more structured, collaborative recess opportunities where all children can participate, and staff are trained and observed, is desirable.

In addition, many principals indicate that we need to do more to promote diversity in the schools and in afterschool/athletic activities. The goal of promoting inclusion at school is particularly germane at a time when expressions of hate have become all too common across the national and world stage. One of MPS’ finest assets is the racial/cultural/economic diversity of its students and families. But appreciating human differences needs to be intentionally cultivated in children and adults. The transition between elementary and Pierce needs special attention. Middle school tends to be an age when children are defining themselves socially, and finding new friendship circles and affiliations. Social exclusion and racial segregation tends to manifest themselves more strongly at this age. Additionally, there is underrepresentation of children of color on certain high school sports teams.

**\*\*Physical Health-** The two most articulated needs for promoting the health and safety of our students are to increase the amount of physical and health education at the elementary level, and to increase student responsible decision making skills-and participatory health education at the high school. MHS teenagers reported high rates of depression and using substances on the YRBS. Students in focus groups expressed that they experienced a great

deal of stress. *A clear strategy to address these issues is needed. Engaging students in problem solving on these matters is consistent with SEL principles and strongly advised.*

**\*\*Curricula-** The Second Step program, in elementary school, is well-received and valued. It has strong lessons and themes, and promotes a common language among staff. It is mostly described as a very strong skills-building, add-on curriculum, but that it could benefit by being supplemented with reinforcing classroom strategies.

**\*\*SEL Assessments-** As already mentioned, a number of SEL assessments are being implemented across the system. To their credit, most of the assessments are conducted at the behest of the individual Principals and other District Leaders. Most of the surveys are using validated questions, but this is not necessarily mandated. Moreover, there is not an agreed upon strategy for what types of information we need to support our SEL goals, what types of assessments we want implemented across the district to measure them (e.g., student self-assessments, school climate, behavioral health, public health, etc.), or at what intervals they should be administered. These are important considerations if the district is to feel confident that its SEL objectives are being met. In addition, if surveys or other measurement tools are administered at different times across the district, or if survey instruments differ and are not validated, then the data is not comparable between or among schools and will be difficult to interpret over time. One additional observation is that the assessments provided by the Second Step program are not being utilized.

#### **IV. Recommendations**

As a starting point, the administration might consider following DESE's recommendations for SEL Planning. The first action steps, then, would be to *build awareness, commitment and ownership for SEL* across the district. Simultaneously, it would be advisable to establish a *shared vision and action plan*. To this end, it is recommended that an SEL Advisory Team be formed at the district level, to include parents, students and staff –including stat that may not normally participate in planning processes (such as Recess and Special Needs

Paraprofessionals), to engage in a planning process aimed at prioritizing action steps to advance SEL competencies over the next three years.

Because we don't want SEL to be siloed or viewed as an "add-on" to academic goals, the prioritized strategies should be incorporated into the district's strategic plan, with Promoting SEL District-wide being an explicit goal of the plan. Relevant efforts, such as recommendations derived from the BHPS Assessment, should be incorporated as well.

#### STUDENT and PARENT DATA SHOULD BE ADDRESSED

Recent data collected by MHS via the student YRBS Survey and by Milton Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition through their Parent Survey (N=800) should be understood and addressed across the school system. Key findings include:

- MHS students have high rates of drinking, binge drinking and consuming marijuana
- There is a growing opioid addiction epidemic in young Milton adults, which typically starts in the younger years
- MHS students report high rates of depression and stress
- Parents' primary concerns for their children are their social relationships, mental health, academic pressures, and exposure to substances (drugs and alcohol).

To assist in the Action Planning process, the following recommendations should be considered and prioritized. These recommendations primarily derive from the SEL Facilitator's leadership staff interviews, and are organized by the priority needs outlined in the Needs Assessment Findings.

#### A. Recommendation: Districtwide Planning and Implementation

A1. Increase awareness and demand for SEL competencies across the system

A2. Develop an SEL Vision for the District and develop an Action Plan

A3. Articulate PreK-12 SEL learning outcomes for the district, and then by school or grade level, within the framework of the District's Vision and Priorities

A4. Standardize best practices, especially among the elementary schools, for promoting school climate, assessments and programs

A5. Revisit SEL-related school committee policies, including the Health and Wellness Policy, for consistency with SEL objectives.

**B. Recommendation: Address the Behavioral Health Needs of Students More Robustly**

B1. Standardize procedures for handling mental health crises or events, with a practical manual that is continually updated with resources, protocols, policies, and referrals

B2. Expand community partnerships to bolster mental health response capacity. This may include academic clinical partnerships as well as with local community organizations

B3. Hire licensed clinical staff (e.g., psychologist or social worker) to help handle behavioral and psychological emergencies (with students or families) as they arise. They would be available to all of the schools and to the Adjustment Counselors who may need clinical consultations about their students. Continue with BCBA Specialist at the preschool.

B4. Consider incrementally building capacity for more Adjustment Counselors across the system

B5. Provide more PD for staff on addressing mental health issues, especially regarding the most pressing issues such as adverse childhood experiences and trauma, substance use disorders, adolescent depression and anxiety, school anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide prevention. Focus on positive behavioral interventions, as opposed to disciplinary approaches when children act out.

B6. Train athletic coaches on strategies for working with athletes and their families about substance use prevention (especially pain medications), peer pressure and mental health coping skills. Follow the new legislation regarding educating athletes, families and coaches about opioids

B7. Offer ongoing skills training programs for adult family members about promoting resiliency in youth. Consider new ways for creatively engaging parents, including policies that require parents to attend specified educational programs and using social media to accommodate their busy schedules

B8. Create policies and practices that reduce mental health stigma and encourage middle and high school students to seek help for emotional distress and substance use struggles.

**C. Recommendation: Focus Professional Development on Classroom SEL Strategies and School Climate**

C1. Create a Professional SEL Learning Community. *Milton University* is a promising idea put forth by Karen McDavitt. This can be the “PD Home” for SEL education across the district

C2. Conduct a staff survey about topics of interest

C3. Consider adding PD staff time to the school calendar that is contractually required. The focus would be on social emotional learning

C4. PD should help faculty understand the benefits of using SEL strategies and incorporating them into everyday practice. Encourage curriculum coordinators and department heads to attend Responsive Classroom or similar seminars, if feasible—to provide practical guidance and supervision to classroom teachers

- C5. Share and standardize promising practices among elementary schools
- C6. Utilize recommendations by the Cultural Competency Committee

D. Recommendation: Increase access to physical activity, health education and wellness

- D1. Charge a staff person with chairing the Health and Wellness Committee to oversee and follow through on proposed activities, in coordination with school committee representatives
- D2. Increase physical and health education time for elementary students
- D3. Attend to faculty health and emotional wellness, such as providing incentives for using the Wildcat Wellness Center and providing stress management or yoga/exercise classes.
- D4. Increase opportunities for high school students to improve their health and decision making with enhanced leadership and participatory problem solving activities

E. Recommendation: Promote social cooperation and inclusiveness

- E1. Investigate structured play opportunities at recess that promote cooperative social skills
- E2. Provide training and supervision to Playground Aides regarding conflict resolution, bullying and promoting inclusion
- E3. Promote inclusion programs that encourage better social integration of diverse and historically marginalized students, including by race, culture, gender, and sexual preference.
- E4. Move forward with Yale University consultant to address the social transition from fifth to sixth grade, focusing on promoting racial/cultural diversity at a time when students become more integrated at middle school

F. Recommendation: Curricula Review

- F1. Examine the social studies curriculum for its emphasis on SEL principles, such as civic engagement
- F2. Enhance social responsibility programs such as “Discovering Justice” curriculum grades K-8 and/or consider offering the ADL’s World of Difference programs at the high school
- F3. Continually examine student literary requirements (e.g., summer reading) for their lessons in character development, and use SEL as an important criteria in evaluating reading assignments
- F4. Strive to incorporate SEL strategies in all academic disciplines, holding department heads responsible for moving in this direction

**G. Recommendation: Establish a system for regularly collecting, analyzing and communicating SEL data**

G1. Identify the kinds of SEL data that are most important to understand, monitor and act on. These may include areas of health risk behaviors, mental health status, student self-efficacy (mindset and grit), and school climate/culture.

G2. Identify the SEL assessment tools to be used and a coordinated implementation schedule. (Note: The Second Step program's assessment tools should be examined and utilized.)

G3. The middle school YHS and high school YRBS should be coordinated and implemented during the same month, every two years between January-May, so that valid analyses can be undertaken between schools and with state estimates. Critical SEL survey questions should be asked in the exact same way in both surveys (which are already very similar) to allow valid comparisons. Use professional survey data analytics professional to analyze the results, and examine differences between grades, gender, sexual preference, and culture/race.

G4. School Climate/Culture and Student Self-assessment Surveys should be piloted, using one of the many assessment tools/questions that are available. The results can be owned by the principals. It is encouraged that all of the elementaries use the same tool. School culture surveys should be implemented at least every 3 years at the same time. Graduate students at university public health and social science programs are often familiar with survey tools and can provide free or inexpensive labor to implement and analyze the data.

G5. Conduct occasional student focus groups at all school levels

G6. Be transparent with the data. Create a communications plan, not only with faculty and the public, but with students as well. Use the data to help students become problem solvers.

G7. Intentionally use data for school/quality improvement.

**V. Conclusion**

SEL practice K-12 is an emerging field that has been shown to be an important part of a well-rounded educational experience. Done properly, and in conjunction with fostering a safe and supportive school environment, SEL will improve school performance and students' life prospects while decreasing school expenditures of time and money spent on managing emotional and social problems.

The field is growing quickly, and so are supports and mandates. New grants and networks are becoming available to put SEL into practice. The Milton Public Schools is fortunate to be one of

the nine school districts chosen across the state to participate in a newly-formed Excellence in SEL Network, following a very competitive application process.

Forming a multi-disciplinary SEL Advisory committee and developing an SEL Action Plan would be an important first step. This document highlights some recommendations and opportunities to inform such a plan. Together with the MPS Compendium of SEL Best Practices and the Inventory of Existing Practices (Appendix A), the district has a set of tools for moving a comprehensive SEL Agenda forward.

**MILTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS INVENTORY of  
SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) PROGRAMS  
Appendix A**

**I. Behavioral and Emotional Health Supports**

**District**

- Outstanding Adjustment Counselors (ACs) at all school levels
- Strong set of School Nurses who are attuned to addressing behavioral health issues.
- Behavioral Health in Public Schools Self-Assessments and Action Plans
- Behavioral Health/Student Support Teams at every level

**Preschool**

Strong emotional control curriculum

**Elementary**

- Behavioral Health Support and Child Study Teams meet about at risk children in all schools
- Adjustment Counselors (ACs) conduct in class lessons in Cunningham and Collicot
- Specialized programs for children with autism
- Tucker staff trained in Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS) procedures
- Staff at all schools are trained in CALM. CALM is a system of de-escalation, prevention and crisis management techniques.
- Glover is developing clear behavioral expectations for each zone in school
- STEP program at Glover for social emotional support for struggling children from any school
- Tucker has mentoring program for high risk 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders
- Tucker has acquired partnerships with academia to increase social work capacity and to support family engagement and cultural competency

**Middle**

- Lunch groups with high risk kids with Adjustment and Guidance Counselors. 1x/wk.
- School Resource Officer access

**High School**

- Strong support available from guidance counselors and School Resource Officers (SRO)
- Take Five Room
- Re-entry program for students away from school for extended periods because of mental health or physical illness
- Alternative Education program for at-risk students who need tailored help in smaller settings

**II. Community and Family Engagement**

**District**

- Full time Family Outreach Liaison (Marti McKenna) fosters the home-school connection, reaches out to struggling families particularly during summer, welcomes new families
- Special Needs Parent Advisory Council



- Engagement with Milton Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition. Noel Vigue on Steering Committee. Student (Arielle Solomon) sits on their Core Stakeholders Group
- Health and Physical Education Dept planning "PARENT" Educational Forum
- Partnerships with Milton Early Childhood Alliance (MECA), 1647 for Home Visiting, Maria Trozzi, Quincy Family Resource Center, QCap for food and preschool vouchers, Milton Residence Fund, New England Ctr for Children provides support for children with autism and Citizens for a Diverse Milton (CDM).
- Parent inputs and supports through PTOs and Site Councils
- Supplementary school funding through Milton Foundation for Education, Milton Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital, Milton Woman's Club, Boosters and FAME
- Superintendent's email blast engages families and includes information about SEL strategies
- Adult Education Program

#### **Preschool and Kindergarten**

- Family Home Visits by Teachers and Family Outreach Liaison
- -New families welcome with Family Outreach Liaison
- Partnerships with MECA to prepare children for kindergarten

#### **Elementary**

- Tucker hoping to launch a Family-School Connections Program with listening sessions, newsletter, promote family interactions, family engagement leadership team, Diversity Committee and buddy program.
- Tucker has a family engagement leadership team and Tucker Unity Night, Open Houses, etc

#### **Middle**

- PTO sponsored family programs
- Best Buddies program
- Peer Leadership programs partnered with DOVE and ADL
- FAVA and FAME parent support programs for the arts

#### **High School**

- Community Service Hours (35)required for graduation
- Bands play at community events
- High School Boosters, FAVA, FAME

### **III. Character Development (responsible decision making, inclusion, empathy, etc)**

#### **Preschool and Kindergarten**

#### **Elementary**

- Second Step Program- SEL skills building program PreK-5
- Morning announcements with Second Step themes
- Bullying prevention at all school. New curriculum being implemented at Tucker
- Kindness Tree, recognizing students doing good deeds, at Glover
- Social skills groups for those with IEPs
- Tucker MCAS Rally. Cultivating Growth and College Mindset
- Tucker has monthly Community Circle, recognizing students on good deeds and citizenship.

- Playground Aides help with socialization on the playgrounds

#### **Middle School**

- Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Peer Leadership Program
- Best Buddies, volunteering to work with children who have developmental disabilities
- Academics in social awareness such as civics, culture, international perspectives, human rights etc
- Kindness Chain
- Health curriculum addresses character development

#### **High School**

- Character development unit on mental health and violence prevention and healthy relationships
- Boys and Girls of Color groups
- Social skills groups for kids having difficulty making friends
- Peer Leadership program where MHS students work with Pierce students
- Best Buddies
- Clubs: Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD), Diversity, Gay/Straight Alliance, Key Club
- DOVE, Inc provides domestic violence education program and peer leadership

### **IV. School Climate**

#### **District**

- Bullying prevention curricula at all schools
- School Resource Officers
- Every school has Diversity Committee
- Citizens for a Diverse Milton meet regularly with superintendent to promote inclusion and tolerance
- See *Cultural Competency Initiatives Executive Summary*, identifying a host of PD opportunities, plans and programs for promoting staff and student diversity and inclusion
- Staff of Color Dialogue Group
- Superintendent has hired consultants from Yale University's Psychology and Cognitive Science Department to work on the fifth-sixth grade social transition of students to promote inclusion

#### **Elementary**

- Second Step curriculum being implemented across schools and in PreK
- Morning announcements with SEL (Second Step) themes
- Kindness Month celebrated at all schools; special *kindness* programs at individual schools
- Collicot meets weekly with Recess Aides for professional support
- Reaching About Diversity (RAD) program at all elementaries. Collection of lessons and books, parent-led thru PTO.
- Anti-bullying curricula, with experimentation with new curriculum at Tucker
- Tucker partners with Boston U. grad school for social work to get an intern to address bullying

#### **Middle**

- Consultant Dr. Hoyt working on addressing racial diversity, implicit bias and inclusion
- *We are Pierce*, a Leadership Team addressing School Climate

- ADL's A World of Difference Institute's Peer Leadership Program (beginning Fall 2018)

### **High**

- Stall Street News
- Peer Leaders work with rising freshmen
- Group Guidance by grade; new procedures for making supports available to students
- Advisory time in homerooms, meant to cultivate relationships between adults and students and between students.
- Freshman Seminar empowers students to succeed academically, personally and socially as they transition into MHS
- Alternative Education Program for at-risk students

## **V. Health and Physical Education**

### **District**

Health and Physical Education Director dedicated to SEL. Half time as Director, rest of time teaching.

### **Elementary**

- Building Our Kids (BOK) success program. Before school breakfast and physical activity. Offered by lottery 45 minutes 2x/week
- Physical education offered 1x/week
- -Tucker working with Sports Clinics in town to encourage more participation of children of color
- Saturday Academy at Tucker School is open to all third grade students for enrichment.

### **Middle**

- Get Real Sexual Health (8<sup>th</sup> gr) and Self-Efficacy curriculum
- Michigan Model Health Curriculum, a skill based curriculum advocating good nutrition and physical health, safety, drugs and alcohol exposure
- Physical Education offered 1x/4 days and Health Education offered 1x/4 days
- Healthy Relationships Peer Leadership with DOVE

### **High**

- Mental Health and Violence Prevention Unit, Physical and Nutritional Health, as well as on Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs (ATOD)
- Health/Physical Education offered every day for half of the year
- DOVE presents to students about promoting healthy and safe social relationships

## **VI. SEL Assessments**

### **District**

- All schools utilized DESE-sponsored Behavioral Health in Public Schools (BHPS) Assessment
- Psychological assessments conducted by School Psychologist
- Data collection analyzed by certain socio-economic and racial indicators
- Faculty Cultural Competency survey conducted

### **PreK and Kindergarten**

Report cards tied strongly to SEL rubric

### **Elementary**

- Standards based report cards tied somewhat to SEL, especially the younger grades
- Comprehensive School Culture Survey at Glover, given to students, parents and faculty
- Collicot conducted family surveys to promote cultural inclusion. Questions included family background, culture, religion
- Tucker conducted a staff survey to gauge how things are working at the school
- Tucker conducts some other assessments of special programs, including those required for Title 1 reporting
- Collicot conducted “minute survey” of fifth grade students

#### **Middle**

- Youth Health Survey (YHS) administered primarily to 7<sup>th</sup> graders and to 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Survey developed by Mass. Dept of Public Health
- One student focus group conducted by Milton Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition
- School Climate survey being done Fall 2017

#### **High**

- Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) will be given every two years in December. Developed by U.S. Centers for Disease Control and overseen by DESE
- Two student focus groups conducted by Milton Substance Abuse Coalition
- Group Guidance exit survey for 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders now includes some School Climate questions
- Teacher evaluations include family/community engagement

#### **School Nursing**

- Certain mandated physical screenings conducted (e.g., scoliosis, BMI)
- Students who seek medical attention are asked about their general wellbeing and data is entered into their SNAP (secured medical online) records
- Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) is required to be administered annually beginning in the 2017-2018 school year to 1 middle school and 1 high school grade. SBIRT screenings in schools are now mandated by regulation, overseen by the Mass Dept of Public Health. Purpose is to screen and identify youth for mental health and substance use issues.