SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING LANDSCAPE SCAN

SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES THAT SUPPORT WHOLE CHILD OUTCOMES IN THE ROAD MAP REGION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For young people to succeed in school, work, and life, they must have access to learning environments where every child feels safe, supported, connected, and inspired to learn and thrive.

A rich and growing body of research points out that learning is inherently social and emotional (Aspen Institute, 2017). For academic skill development to occur, especially for youth that have been marginalized because of race, poverty, or other societal circumstances, families, schools, expanded-learning providers, and community members must work together to build environments that promote social and emotional learning (SEL), inspire a sense of belonging, and reflect and value the diversity of the youth we serve. This comprehensive approach to SEL that includes school culture and climate as well as classroom instruction in both formal and informal (expanded learning) settings, has led us to use the phrase "whole child, whole day" to describe the broader context of SEL-related efforts.

Taking a "whole child" approach means weaving social, emotional, and academic skill development together in an environment that is welcoming, supportive, and inclusive for all youth. This whole child approach acknowledges that learning doesn't only happen during school time, but across the "whole day" in a variety of settings, and recognizes that families, schools, expanded-learning providers, and community members must work together to build an integrated system of supports for our youth.

At the heart of a whole child effort is social and emotional learning. SEL is broadly understood as the process through which youth and adults build awareness and skills in managing emotions, setting goals, establishing relationships, and making responsible decisions- leading to success in school and life (CASEL, 2018). These skills develop in a complex system of contexts, interactions, and relationships, indicating that a comprehensive approach that emphasizes a positive, inclusive school [and community] climate and culture is needed for each child to thrive (Aspen Institute, 2018).

During the 2017-2018 school year, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Youth Development Executives of King County (YDEKC) undertook a landscape scan to better understand how school districts and youth programs in the Road Map Project region (South Seattle and South King County, Washington) are addressing social and emotional skill development through the lens of a whole child, whole day approach. The scan process included a survey of participants from YDEKC's 2017 SEL Symposium (62 respondents), key informant interviews with district and community leaders (16 individuals), reviews of national and local reports, and insights from SEL-related cross sector convenings in the Road Map region (9 meetings). We intend for this landscape scan to be used by YDEKC, school districts, community partners, and funders to identify

opportunities for cross-sector collaboration, alignment, and learning to support whole child outcomes. The scan aims to serve as a launch point to deepen SEL-related efforts in the region. Ultimately, we hope this leads to more youth-serving environments where every child feels safe, supported, connected, and inspired to learn and thrive.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Through the scan process, the following core principles emerged for whole child, whole day efforts to thrive in our region. These principles call attention to past learnings from the Road Map Project and are not about specific programs or initiatives. Instead, they are guiding principles that must be woven throughout all efforts to build effective and equitable learning environments:

A Commitment to Racial Equity: YDEKC and the Road Map Project are committed to supporting King County's highest need young people and closing the opportunity gap for children of color. This commitment needs to inform the systems we build and the practices and strategies we implement in this whole child, whole day approach. This includes the active pursuit of cultural responsiveness and cultural relevancy in not only settings, but also in curricula and pedagogy. It also means re-imagining instructional practices so that teachers and youth development professionals can tailor their approaches to uplift the strengths and respond to the needs of the youth of color they serve.

Youth and Family Centered: Strong family engagement practices are another key piece of the Road Map Project's system-wide efforts. A whole day, whole child approach affirms this core principle, and posits that youth need be at the center as well. This means seeking, valuing, and honoring the ideas, perspectives, and knowledge of both youth and families. Our youth have much to teach us and we need ways to not only tap their voice, but to incorporate their opinions and ideas into systems that serve them.

Authentic and Collaborative Partnerships: The Road Map Project could not exist without the commitment and collaboration of partners from various sectors. This is true for a whole child, whole day system as well. Partnership efforts across the region have demonstrated that taking the necessary steps to build trusting relationships between adults working in schools and in partner organizations in order to equalize power dynamics and value the contributions of each partner, is vital to building a system of supports across the whole day.

High-Quality Practice: The environment in which youth spend their time is tied to how they feel about themselves, their community, and their chances of achieving the future they desire. It is well established that the quality of the classroom or program environment affects outcomes. Furthermore, quality can be measured and improved through intentional improvement processes. Remaining focused on the quality of experiences young people are having in our classrooms and youth programs is essential to improving youth outcomes.

FINDINGS

As we scanned the region for systems and structures that support whole child outcomes, it affirmed that SEL is defined in many different ways. In the literature, in our key informant interviews, and in SEL- related trainings we repeatedly heard that defining social and emotional learning is a challenging task. Part of the difficulty stems from the fact that SEL has become a catch-all phrase for a broad range of skills, dispositions, mindsets,

beliefs, and competencies demonstrated through research in a wide range of disciplines to be critical to succeeding in school, work and life. This has made SEL difficult to succinctly articulate, measure, and advocate for. While conducting this scan, we framed our questions in terms of a whole child approach, by asking what supports are in place that foster a positive climate and SEL skill development. Several themes emerged:

1. "THE READINESS HERE IS PHENOMENAL."

We found an awareness and articulated support for whole child efforts across the region and in all seven school districts' central administrations. While a holistic approach has long been a focus for youth development organizations and intermediaries such as School's Out Washington and YDEKC, the potential of language and practice alignment with schools is now growing. At the King County government level, the Best Starts for Kids implementation team is also taking a very holistic approach to ensuring all young people can thrive, and is implementing funding processes to meet that goal. King County Executive Dow Constantine's stated goal is now for all young people to be "happy, healthy, safe and thriving"(King County). At the state level, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has convened a Social and Emotional Learning Benchmark Workgroup (SELB) to create guiding principles, standards, and benchmarks to support SEL development in schools, slated to be released in June 2019. OSPI's refresh on their mission and values includes a "focus on the whole child"(OSPI, 2018). These statements by governmental leadership at multiple jurisdictions provides language that could catalyze SEL-related efforts in the region and across the state.

2. "IT'S NOT THE WHAT IT'S THE HOW."

Although district central offices are all working towards building a vision and comprehensive framework for supporting all students, the "how" of bringing this vision to life varies from district to district, and even more widely from school to school. All districts in the Road Map region have teams focused on developing racial equity policies at the system level, as well as a range of efforts focused on cultural relevancy, positive identity development, and other anti-bias efforts at the direct-service or classroom level. Similar efforts are being made by youth-serving organizations to ensure that disparities in opportunities and outcomes can be eliminated and each and every young person can thrive. Additionally, districts are increasingly focused on reducing exclusionary, and often racially-biased, discipline practices, and on increasing efforts around trauma-informed and restorative practices. A multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) framework is also being implemented in many districts which can help to ensure appropriate supports are directed where they are needed most, with SEL practices often viewed as a "universal" (or tier 1) support.

Most schools across the region use an explicit SEL curriculum at primary sites, but fidelity of implementation of the curriculum varies. All districts report some of their primary schools using the Second Step or RULER curriculum, as well as a variety of other curricula and initiatives. We did not see this trend at the secondary level, except in some middle schools. However, there are many programs and activities that focus on student mindsets and learning strategies at the secondary level that may not be named "SEL," but function to support student's SEL skill development.

Some Expanded Learning Opportunity (ELO) programs use SEL curriculum to explicitly teach SEL skills. Most ELOs embed SEL-affirming practices as core to "how" they provide programs.

3. "HOW CAN WE DEVELOP SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS IN YOUTH, WHEN WE (ADULTS) STRUGGLE WITH IT?"

Across the board, we heard that SEL needs to start with adults, and this can be a challenge. In multiple conversations, the challenge of shifting adult mindsets, actions, and behaviors to prioritize and model social and emotional learning practices in the classroom was a prevalent and urgent theme. Educators did express their enthusiasm for professional development opportunities for SEL-related strategies such as restorative practices and culturally responsive teaching. But we also heard that on-going support and explicit time to teach SEL was a need. In some cases, educators are initially provided with the training to do SEL-related work, but the time and resources to execute or sustain these strategies are lacking.

This is an area where the youth development field has long been focused on providing training content relevant to creating a safe, supportive, engaging environment for youth. Youth programs in the region have been working to build high-quality programs that promote social and emotional learning and identity-safety for quite some time. School's Out Washington (SOWA), a state-wide intermediary organization dedicated to building community systems to support quality youth development programs, led the process of developing a set of Quality Standards for the expanded learning field rooted in social and emotional learning practices. These standards provide guidance to youth development professionals in the areas of Cultural Competency and Responsiveness; Relationships; and Youth Leadership and Engagement. Since 2009, over 600 youth programs in our state have participated in a continuous quality improvement process aligned to the Standards utilizing a validated, research-based assessment tool from the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality called the Youth Program Quality Assessment. In the upcoming school year, 400 youth programs in this quality improvement system will be leveling up to a revised quality improvement tool that expands on SEL efforts.

4. "BUILDING AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS TAKE TIME."

Collaboration with families and community partners was also pointed out as a key piece of supporting SEL and creating a safe and positive school culture. It was pointed out in several discussions that this is often an afterthought or a "last step" rather than the "first step" in informing decisions. School districts in the region are increasing family and community engagement efforts such as creating task forces that include families and creating positions such as community liaisons. SEL and positive school climate can mean many different things among youth, family, and communities and it is crucial to include these perspectives when building systems to support our youth. Partnerships and collaboration takes time, resources and commitment to ensure alignment and seamlessness for young people throughout their days. Even when there is commitment, many districts and schools in the region lack the time and resources to build out systems of collaboration to support school-based partnerships. Many of the bright spots in the region devoted to whole child efforts, mentioned during the scan process, are partnerships with schools, families, and various community partners across sectors that have been developed over time.

5. "IT'S HARD TO PROVE EFFECTIVENESS OF PREVENTIVE WORK."

Identifying the data that will support continuous improvement in the SEL domain remains challenging. Measures of social and emotional skills at the individual level are in a fairly emergent stage, and there could be unintended consequences for kids that get labeled as lacking SEL skills. A less controversial and more useful approach could be to focus on measures that provide information on the environments in which young people spend their time. Across the Road Map region, school districts are collecting data on school climate and culture using a variety of student, staff, and parent surveys. The most commonly used tool is a survey tool administered by the Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE). YDEKC partnered with CEE in 2012-2013 to pilot Student Engagement and Motivation (SEM) scales in conjunction with CEE's standard Educational Effectiveness Survey (EES). This tool has evolved and is now called the "EES-Student with SEL survey," and is used by all Road Map districts for at least a portion of their schools. Several districts also administer their own climate surveys that are more closely aligned to district priorities. However, use of this data for program planning purposes varies from district to district, and from school to school.

In addition to surveys, observational assessment tools like the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA), used in hundreds of youth programs around the state, can provide information on the extent to which the environment supports social and emotional development. Similarly, the classroom-based observational assessments that are part of Washington State's Teacher and Principal Evaluation Program (TPEP) describe teaching practices that "foster and promote safe and inclusive learning environment[s]" that take into account the "physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being of students" (OSPI, *n.d*). Placing existing data more explicitly into an SEL framework, and focusing on its use in a continuous improvement context is an opportunity to leverage existing measurement tools.

LANDSCAPE SCAN LIMITATIONS

The scale and scope of a scan attempting to describe whole child efforts in the region could be limitless. We focused this scan on system-wide efforts in school districts and youth serving organizations that seemed most closely aligned to social and emotional learning efforts, and about which less is publicly known. This scan does not include information on other holistic support areas such as mental health, nutrition, and housing, though we recognize that these settings are just as critical to whole child outcomes. The YDEKC team focused on collecting information from school districts leaders to complement our knowledge of the youth development sector in King County. Because of this, a majority of our key informant interviews were with district staff. We also did not focus on collecting information at the school or site level, or from young people and their families, as we believe this will be most fruitful and important when done in partnership and collaboration with district staff to ensure the feedback and input can be acted upon in the near term. During the process, we discovered there was a vast amount of information in local Road Map reports and convenings which we sought to synthesize rather than replicate. As we hope this scan will lead to deeper planning efforts and future collaborative work with districts (including community partners).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the synthesis of the data and information gathered through the scan process, YDEKC offers the following recommendations or

opportunities. None of our recommendations are simple or offer a way to just "check the box." All of our recommendations require deep time and commitment for building relationships, integrating systems and practices, and putting complex pieces together to form an effective whole child, whole day experience for each and every child in the Road Map Region, and beyond. Our recommendations also build on, and deepen, recommendations that came from our earlier symposia: the region needs to better understand and articulate a vision that explicitly incorporates social and emotional learning, define what an integrated system of supports looks like, and create alignment and a common language for this work among all stakeholders in the region.[1] Progress is slowly being made to heighten the emphasis on social emotional development of young people and adults in the region, and we believe the following recommendations can speed that progress.

1. Develop consistent messaging about the holistic needs of youth and the systems and structures needed to cultivate SEL across the day.

Social and emotional learning involves more than developing specific skills and competencies; it is also depends upon the environments, interactions, and relationships that youth encounter throughout their day and throughout their year. Whether we call it a whole child approach, social emotional and academic development (SEAD), 21st century skills, or personalized learning, we essentially are working towards creating learning environments that support the growth of a happy, healthy, safe, and thriving individual. We can no longer afford to segregate our efforts in supporting the academic, behavioral, and social well-being of our children and youth. Developing coherent language and messages so that all sectors and partners (this includes families and community) can see clearly how they connect and contribute to a whole child approach is a start towards building more alignment within the region and state. This is also an opportunity to explicitly make the connection of SEL, racial equity, and the role it plays in building positive climate and culture. From a policy perspective, developing a coherent language for SEL is also necessary for garnering support and influencing various stakeholders, such as funders and policy-makers.

2. Strengthen connections and alignment within districts and across sectors to connect whole child supports.

Integrating SEL across learning environments across the whole day is still an aspirational goal. Even though each district recognizes the value of a whole child approach, many districts need explicit time and resources to align their efforts internally and externally with partners and families. SEL touches many departments such as Teaching and Learning, Equity, Partnerships, Student Supports, and Data and Evaluation. However, in most districts, especially larger ones- it is challenging for these teams to bridge their work. In some cases, it is not clear who should lead this connection of whole child efforts. In most cases, SEL was one of many domains in a director's job description, and not necessarily explicit. MTSS and integrated student support models are a good start in aligning efforts, but internal departments need dedicated time to continually make connections between their bodies of work. Some connections are not as obvious as others. For example, SEL and racial equity work within a district need to be connected, especially when building relationships with youth and families and working toward inclusive, safe school climates. Partners and families

also need to be involved in alignment efforts from the beginning.

3. Increase professional development and capacity support for educators and leaders to strengthen their own SEL skills and the practices to create learning environments that foster SEL in youth.

Recent national reports have been released from the Aspen Institute and CASEL that emphasize the need to address adults' skills and beliefs as they play an integral role in promoting social and emotional skill development. The conversation has shifted from what skills and dispositions *youth* need to succeed in school and life to what skills and dispositions *adults* need to create the conditions and supports for every child to thrive. Although many have expressed their enthusiasm for SEL-related professional development, there is still inadequate support for the adults and educators who are doing this work. We are seeing more professional development towards SEL-related approaches like restorative practices, trauma-informed approaches, and culturally relevant pedagogy. The recent influx of Best Starts for Kids investments has helped to support training in Trauma Informed and Restorative Practices (TIRP); however, there is still a need for on-going support to ensure fidelity of these practices and to sustain the work moving forward. In one instance, we heard of a school team being trained to implement SEL curriculum, but with staff turnover and competing priorities, they were unable to teach the curriculum in a consistent manner. In some cases, the counselor is the only designated staff person charged with "teaching SEL." Some teachers have reported not "having time" to teach SEL. On-going coaching and providing teachers with time and resources to teach explicit SEL curriculum and/or SEL-related instruction are needed to sustain this effort.

4. Increase and build upon existing collaborative partnerships with families and community partners by integrating explicit SEL efforts in partnership ecosystems in the Road Map region.

Families and community organizations are critical thought partners on what their children and youth need and must be involved in our effort to integrate and align SEL practices across the school day and out-of-school time. Past efforts in the Road Map Region, such as the Race to the Top grant that provided initial funding to the seven school districts in the Road Map region to improve student achievement, supported investments such as intensive school-community partnerships at various sites. These one to four-year investments were called "Deep Dive" grants, as it allowed school districts and community partners to investigate what it takes to build an intensive school-community partnership to achieve student success for families in the opportunity gap. Furthermore, Best Starts for Kids has invested in partnerships in schools and communities across the county that "address the many factors that support physical, social, and emotional well-being" of children and families. A review of these investments is an opportunity to build upon and align SEL efforts within these partnerships.

5. Support the use of data for continuous improvement that emphasize the learning environment, adult practices and youth and family perspectives.

How do we know whether our SEL-related efforts are having an impact? Measuring students' SEL skills for accountability purposes is a controversial

subject; research in this field is still emerging locally and nationally. However, assessments that focus on the learning environment itself can provide valuable information on how schools and programs are progressing in their SEL-related efforts. All school districts are currently using climate surveys to some extent, and many schools are actively integrating climate data into their planning processes. We encourage stakeholders to support these efforts to better our understanding of the kinds of data that are proving most valuable to educators in their efforts to build safe and inclusive schools. Additionally, the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) has SEL-related scales which are currently undergoing a validation process. We encourage youth program providers to engage in this process, and to share their learning with their partners in the K-12 sectors. Work in both of these areas can further our understanding of how specific actions in the classroom or youth program relate to the development of social and emotional competencies.

NEXT STEPS

In the fall of 2018, YDEKC will share the full report, and associated district-level profiles, with key stakeholders in the region to inform next steps in building the ecosystem of supports young people need to ensure that they are happy, healthy, safe, and thriving. Specifically, YDEKC intends to cultivate an SEL Action Team to help shape the vision for the Road Map Project and define YDEKC's role and priorities moving forward in the SEL Landscape. YDEKC also intends to continue to build relationships with the seven school districts in the Road Map region to work toward internal alignment and/or school-CBO alignment on SEL-related efforts. To access the full report, or to request to be included on the mailing list for YDEKC's quarterly SEL Newsletter, visit YDEKC's website at www.ydekc.org

WHO IS YDEKC?

Youth Development Executives of King County (YDEKC) is a coalition and cross-sector convener supporting the holistic success of children and youth in King County. Our members represent more than 100 non-profit organizations directly serving youth ages 5 through young adulthood within King County. YDEKC works to build bridges between organizations and across systems to create an ecosystem of supports for the whole child across the whole day.

WHAT IS THE ROAD MAP PROJECT?

The Road Map project is a collective impact initiative that began in 2010 to improve student achievement from cradle through collage and career in seven King County, Washington school districts: Auburn, Federal Way, Highline, Kent, Renton, (South) Seattle, and Tukwila. Together, this region is home to 92 percent of the county's high-poverty schools. Among the Road Map region's 127,290 K-12 students: 71 percent are of color, 55 percent are low-income, and 22 percent are English language learners. Through multisector collaboration with hundreds of partners and individuals, the Road Map Project aims to increase equitable policies and practices in education systems to eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps, and for 70 percent of its region's youth to earn a college or career credential by 2030.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The full list of research documents and references for the scan is listed in the full report, available at ydekc.org. Some of the foundational reports

and references that contributed to this scan include:

- Aspen Institute. (2017). The Evidence Base for How We Learn: Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. Retrieved from https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/evidence-base-learn/.

- Aspen Institute. (2018). Pursuing Social and Emotional Development Through a Racial Equity Lens: A Call to Action. Retrieved from https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/05/Aspen-Institute_Framing-Doc_Call-to-Action.pdf

- Community Center for Education Results. (2017). *Road Map Project Results Report.* Retrieved from http://roadmapproject.org/data-center/reports/2017resultsreport/

- Cooley, S. (2017). *Start With US: Black Youth In South King County and South Seattle.* Seattle: Community Center for Education Results. Retrieved from http://roadmapproject.org/data-center/reports/startwithus/

- Durlak et al. (2011). *The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta Analysis of school based universal interventions.* Child Development.

- Sarmiento, S. B. (2018). *The Practice Base for How We Learn.* Aspen Institite. Retrieved from https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/practice-base-learn-supporting-students-social-emotional-academic-development/

- School's Out Washington (SOWA)(2017). *SEL Brief: Supporting the Whole Child Across the Day and Year.* Retrieved from https://www.schoolsoutwashington.org/pages/social-emotional-learning

- Social and Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup (SELB). (2016). *Addressing Social Emotional Learning in Washington's K-12 Public Schools.* Retrieved from http://www.k12.wa.us/Workgroups/SELB-Meetings/SELBWorkgroup2016Report.pdf

- State of Washington. Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). (2018). *About OSPI.* Retrieved from http://www.k12.wa.us/AboutUs/default.aspx

- State of Washington. Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). (2017). *Washington Intergated Student Supports Protocol.* Retrieved from http://www.k12.wa.us/CISL/ISS/

- State of Washington. Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) (*n.d.*). Teacher evaluation criteria and descriptors. Retrieved from http://www.k12.wa.us/TPEP/pubdocs/TeacherCriteriaDescriptors.pdf

- Youth Development Executives of King County (YDEKC). (2014). *Skills and Dispositions that Support Youth Success in School.* Retrieved from https://ydekc.org/resource-center/skills-and-dispositions-pt-1/