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# Advocacy For Compliance With Existing Policy in Social Emotional Learning

Emilie Correa

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ADVOCACY FOR COMPLIANCE WITH EXISTING POLICY IN SOCIAL  
EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Emilie Day Dieck-Correa

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of  
Doctor of Education  
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

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# Document Origination Statement for Digital Commons @ NLU

This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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## Abstract

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) standards were adopted by the state of Illinois in 2004. Local SEL policy was adopted by District 1234 in 2010. This policy advocacy work presents how findings from a district's SEL Audit helped a team of administrators identify areas for growth and advocate for compliance of existing state and local SEL policy. This work documents how a district went from no SEL programming, to the creation of an SEL Task Force, the powering of SEL standards, and the planning for systemic implementation of SEL. According to research (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011), students who participated in SEL programming demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance (11 percentile point gain in achievement). Further research (Zakrzewski, 2013) proposes that the benefits of SEL programming is not only intended for students, it has a profound positive impact on teachers that embrace SEL tenets. These findings are only a sample of the growing empirical data that bolsters the positive impact of SEL programming in our schools. By learning more about SEL and the benefits of SEL programming, educators, policymakers, and the greater community can join together to advocate for social and emotional well-being in our nation's schools.

## Preface

I am the Emotional Wellness Coordinator in District 1234 (pseudonym). I am currently in the fourth year of serving the district in this capacity. My job responsibilities include oversight of the Emotional Wellness Committees at each individual school, and working collaboratively with students, staff, administrators, parents, and community members to further enhance a multitiered approach to Emotional Wellness and SEL. As the coordinator, I must exemplify emotional well-being while demonstrating a commitment to provide a healthy culture and climate in all district endeavors. In addition to supporting the work of Emotional Wellness Committees at each school in the district, I coordinate wellness initiatives and opportunities at the district level, publish a district-wide Emotional Wellness newsletter, gather, and analyze data from culture and climate surveys, conduct longitudinal studies of data, and report findings annually to the Board of Education.

My leadership skills and competencies over the past four years have been shaped by my experience as the Emotional Wellness Coordinator. In my first year, I clearly remember thinking to myself that there was great irony in the way I was feeling about my leadership capacity, and the fact that I was the district expert in Emotional Wellness. Since then, I have grown and developed my leadership skills and abilities. I would be willing to say that I believe that the most important leadership lesson I have learned over the past four years is that self-care is essential in leadership, and one must learn to find balance in life and work. That said, I prioritize homing in on my strengths, sharing leadership, being myself, and seeking help, and delegating tasks to colleagues when necessary.

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## **Section One: Introduction**

The policy advocacy work I have accomplished in D1234 has been both taxing and rewarding. As a leader, I have found my voice and feel confident that as a result of my coursework, the skill set I bring forth is appreciated and valued by district administration. During my tenure as Emotional Wellness Coordinator I have built professional relationships based on trust, reliability, and respect. I believe that the leadership qualities I have gleaned as a result of this work are first and foremost, being a learner. I genuinely value education, and as cliché as it may sound, I consider myself to be a lifelong learner. I have also learned that I am a potential cultivator. Being a good listener and observer, I have the ability to recognize and cultivate potential in others. That said, I am people centered. I excel in building relationships and integrating groups. Lastly, I have come to realize that I am an initiator in that I like to turn thoughts into actions.

I find that in leadership, different situations call for different skills. I am committed to continual self-improvement, to the improvement of the institutions in which I work, and improvement of the world at large. I will continue to inform my leadership skills by staying abreast of current research, reading scholarly journals and articles, seeking support from colleagues, reflecting often, and continuing to strive for balance in work and life.

“Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education” – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Evidenced by research, and esteemed by recent federal legislation, the importance of teaching the whole child, and implementing SEL in our schools is essential for the wellbeing of our students, our staff, our schools, our communities, and our world. Now more than ever, it is critical to teach our youth SEL skills and competencies, also referred to as Emotional

Intelligence, soft skills, noncognitive skills, and interpersonal skills. Underpinning of all these skills and competencies is the ability to acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set, and achieve positive goals, feel, and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2017). In the following pages, I will advocate for adherence to existing local school board policy which calls for the incorporation of SEL in D1234's educational program, and compliance in teaching Illinois State SEL Standards. In this policy advocacy piece, I will argue that existing SEL policy has been overshadowed by the current trend in testing and accountability. In alignment with the abundance of compelling research demonstrating the benefits of SEL, I will argue that Tier 1 SEL programming is in the best interest of our schools, our communities, and our world.

In 1994, a group of researchers and advocates of SEL formed the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). This group united with the common goal of establishing high-quality, evidence-based SEL as an essential part of preschool through high school education (CASEL, 2017). In 1996, CASEL moved their headquarters from Yale University, to University of Illinois, Chicago, under the leadership of Roger Weissburg. By 1997, CASEL, along with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) developed a ground-breaking book, *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*, which focused primarily on the missing piece in education, SEL.

In *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*, SEL proponents sought to address what they deemed was the missing link in education, that is, focusing on the whole student to include social and emotional wellbeing, as opposed to solely focusing on test scores and academic measurement. By promoting SEL guidelines for educators, this work

peaked the curiosity of SEL advocates and educational researchers alike. Being that CASEL's headquarters were relocated to Illinois in the mid 1990s, it comes as no surprise that in 2004, Illinois was the first state in the nation to adopt preschool through high school SEL state standards. That said, preschool through high school SEL state learning standards have been in place for over a decade in Illinois, with states such as Kansas, Maine, Missouri, and Pennsylvania following close behind.

In 2010, local school board policy supporting the Illinois State SEL Standards was adopted by D1234. On paper, Illinois and D1234 were pioneers in SEL policy at state and local levels. As commendable as this may appear on record, my research will highlight that adoption of SEL state standards and local school board policy does not ensure that students are being afforded the rightful, well-rounded education they deserve, including SEL curriculum and programming. D1234 put wheels in motion with the creation of the Emotional Wellness Program, however, the Emotional Wellness Program does not equal SEL curriculum and programming. The situation in Illinois as described above exposes a major flaw in both state and local SEL policy, and that is a lack of accountability measures in place.

How can parents, policy makers, and the greater community be certain that schools and districts are in compliance with state and local SEL policy? How are schools being held accountable for incorporating the SEL standards in their educational program? In response to these questions, I will illustrate how D1234, a district that was not in compliance with its own SEL board policy or the Illinois SEL state standards, achieved district wide SEL implementation. In doing so, I am hopeful that this policy advocacy piece can support other districts who find themselves in a similar situation. By sharing how D1234 went from being a district with good intentions, yet no clear or consistent SEL programming, aspired, planned, and successfully

implemented SEL district-wide, I hope to provide a roadmap for other districts that serves to facilitate the implementation of SEL programming.

Using the example of how D1234 went about district-wide implementation of SEL, my policy advocacy piece will move forward with a call for accountability as it relates to both state and district SEL policy. My work in D1234 has afforded me the opportunity to engage in policy advocacy firsthand. Along with the support of the D1234 Administration, the SEL Administrative Team has managed to successfully implement SEL district-wide. Believe me when I say that that this was no small feat. I am honored to share this important journey by providing a detailed account of our implementation process. It is my hope that other districts follow suit and support the healthy development of the whole child while achieving compliance with local and state policy.

I will be outlining the existing SEL district policy, state goals and standards. Then, I will present an argument as to why I feel that these SEL policies merit advocacy. Next, I will present a plan for policy implementation and offer ideas for assessment, although I will tread lightly on the topic of SEL assessment as assessing SEL is a highly contested topic. Lastly, I will discuss potential outcomes in terms of the impact that compliance with the existing policy, goals, and standards might have in D1234, the state of Illinois, and United States, and society as a whole.

### **Illinois Social and Emotional Learning Goals**

As mentioned above, in 2004, the state of Illinois was the first state in the nation to adopt preschool through high school SEL goals and standards. Illinois has identified three social emotional learning goals inclusive of 10 SEL learning standards (See Appendix A).

**Goal 1** - Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.

**Goal 2** - Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.

**Goal 3** - Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community (ISBE.net)

CASEL developed five SEL competencies; Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making. Figure 1. provides a visual representation of how CASEL's five SEL competencies, correlate with, and form the basis of the Illinois State SEL Goals. Advocates for SEL, such as myself, believe—and research continues to demonstrate—that students with these SEL skills and competencies will be less likely to have discipline issues or engage in bullying or other destructive behaviors, that teachers trained in SEL practices can create safer, more supportive and engaged classroom environments, and that student achievement will show small but significant gains (Durlak et al., 2011). Additionally, many of these social-emotional skills directly relate to personal qualities and interpersonal skills most employers say they want to see in their work force (NASBE, 2013).

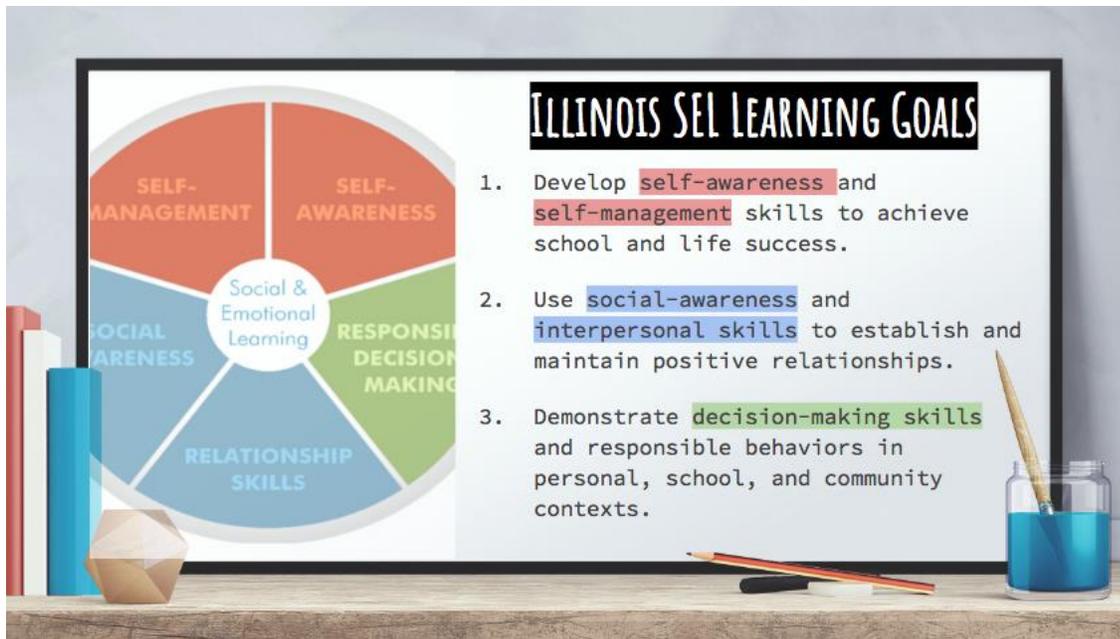


Figure 1. CASEL’s five Competencies of SEL and the Illinois State SEL Goals

CASEL researchers recently completed a State Scan Scorecard Project to gauge the development of preschool through high school SEL goals, standards, and guidelines in all 50 states (Dusenbury, Newman, Weissberg, Goren, Domitrovich & Mart, 2015). According to this research, Illinois, Kansas, Maine and West Virginia have free-standing SEL goals, with developmental benchmarks preschool through high school. Connecticut, Idaho, Ohio, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Washington have comprehensive, free-standing SEL goals with developmental benchmarks, preschool through early elementary (Dusenbury et al. 2015). This research unveils that only 11 out of the 50 states have comprehensive, free-standing SEL goals with developmental benchmarks. However, the report suggests that more states are looking to adopt SEL state standards as educators, advocates of SEL, and policymakers alike know that a student’s social and emotional health has a significant impact on learning (NASBE, 2013). Fortunately, Illinois is one of the few states that has incorporated SEL goals and standards

as an expectation for all schools. Unfortunately, despite these SEL goals, standards, and policies, there are no procedures in place to drive accountability and ensure that these goals, standards, and policies are being adhered to.

### **District 1234 School Board Policy 6:65**

In alignment with the Illinois State SEL Standards, District 1234 adopted school board policy 6:65 (See Figure 2) in 2010, which states, “Student social and emotional development shall be incorporated in the District’s educational program and shall be consistent with the social and emotional development standards to be contained in the Illinois Learning Standards.” (BOE policy 6:65, 2010). Policy 6:65 declares that the District 1234’s SEL programming should be consistent with the state SEL standards; meaning student should be taught to develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success, use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships, and demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts (ISBE.net). As such, and for the sake of this argument, it is evident that SEL policies are in place, and have been for some time at both the state and district level; however, there is a serious gap between the policy being in place and what is being taught in schools. I will posit that there is a reason many schools, including D1234 lost sight of educating the whole child. I will argue that in the era of standardized testing and accountability, SEL has been upstaged by other high stakes curricular demands that are being measured and reported upon such as math and reading, and compliance with existing SEL policy at both district and state level are spotty at best (Correa, 2017).

## Instruction

### Student Social and Emotional Development

Student social and emotional development shall be incorporated in the District's educational program and shall be consistent with the social and emotional development standards to be contained in the Illinois Learning Standards. The objectives for addressing the needs of students for social and emotional development through the educational programs are to:

1. Enhance students' school readiness, academic success, and use of good citizenship skills;
2. Foster a safe, supportive learning environment where students feel respected and valued;
3. Teach social and emotional skills to all students;
4. Partner with families and the community to promote students' social and emotional development; and
5. Prevent or minimize mental health problems in students.

LEGAL REF.: Children's Mental Health Act of 2003, 405 ILCS 49/1 et seq.

CROSS REF.: 6:270 (Guidance and Counseling Program), 7:100 (Health, Eye, and Dental Examinations; Immunizations; and Exclusion of Students), 7:180 (Prevention of and Response to Bullying, Intimidation, and Harassment), 7:250 (Student Support Services)

ADOPTED: September 28, 2010

*Figure 2.* District 1234 School Board Policy 6:65, student social and emotional development.

In addition to my speculation that standardized testing has forced SEL to take a back seat in the broadscope of the educational arena, I also deem governance to play a major role in regard to accountability and compliance of SEL goals, standards, and policy. I propose that this lack of accountability in compliance with state and local SEL policy is a matter of governance.

“Governance is about fostering relationships of accountability among citizens, government institutions, and private suppliers. Thus it affects the efficiency and effectiveness of how policies are formulated and how resources are allocated” (Lombardi, 2008, p.3). Administration must act as stewards of the public and follow through with upholding educational institutions that comply with state and local policy and employ research based, best practices for our students.

As I have described in previous sections of this dissertation, namely the Program Evaluation (Correa, 2015), and Change Leadership Plan (Correa, 2016), I have been diligent in

my efforts to bolster SEL in D1234 since accepting my current role as Emotional Wellness Coordinator. Through my advocacy work to date, I have advocated for the fostering of relationships between district administration, the Board of Education, educators, and the parent community in District 1234 as it relates to accountability and compliance issues in SEL programming. More specifically, I have advocated for the formulation of a plan outlining processes and procedures that will assist D1234 in the implementation of SEL standards and programming district-wide. Additionally, I have advocated for and assisted in the formulation of a SEL governance committee.

Over a three year span, I have advocated for SEL implementation district-wide in multiple settings, most notably at school board meetings. Each year, I am asked to present to the school board the results of the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI), our school culture and climate survey. Each year, I have painstakingly highlighted that the lowest overall average mean score has been in the dimension of social and emotional security. With this data, I have explicitly stated the need for district-wide implementation of SEL.

Tapping into our local resources, I developed an emotional wellness parent speaker series in an effort to educate our parent community on the topic of SEL. Local therapists, chiropractors, and even our own school psychologist, have given presentations to parents on topics ranging from stress, parenting moody children, anxiety, balance, and wellness. The EW Parent Speaker Series has proved a success with steady attendance and positive feedback requesting more SEL topics be brought to the spotlight.

In addition to school board presentations and the Parent Speaker Series, I have advocated for SEL by delivering district-wide SEL professional development (PD) for staff. I have used every opportunity possible to provide SEL at building level Emotional Wellness Committee

meetings and workshops to encourage and model how to incorporate SEL into one's teaching practice. As such, I have played a key role as the SEL expert and advocate on the the SEL Administrative Team in D1234.

The SEL Administrative Team has developed a plan to implement SEL district-wide in the 2018-2019 school year. In order to implement SEL with fidelity, I will continue to inform the team of current SEL research and best practices, as well as advocate for the PD of all those delivering SEL programming. It is our hope to effectively and efficiently adopt a viable, research based SEL curriculum and be ready for implementation in SY 2018-2019. In my role as EWC Coordinator, I have set the proverbial stage for district-wide implementation of SEL through governance by appealing to D1234 administration, creation of an SEL Administrative Team, formation of an SEL Task Force, presenting SEL PD to all stakeholder groups, and tireless advocacy for compliance of the existing D1234 School Board Policy 6:65, and Illinois State SEL goals and standards.

### **Section Two: Analysis of Need**

The problem is clear. At present, few states have adopted SEL standards, and of those states that have adopted standards, such as Illinois, there are no real accountability measures in place to ensure compliance. With large scale research findings, such as Durlak and Weissberg's Meta-analysis (2011), when done correctly, SEL program implementation has had undeniable benefits to students, schools, districts, communities, and arguably, society as a whole. Research combined with current federal legislation Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), has yielded more and more attention being turned toward SEL skills and competencies. It would appear that there has never been a more opportunistic time for states and districts alike to implement SEL in

schools, create systems to enforce accountability, and ensure fidelity to the scope and sequence of these programs.

Although states such as Massachusetts, and districts such as Austin Independent School District in Texas are shouldering the task of pioneering large scale implementation, SEL programming and instruction continues to be an area for growth nationwide. Despite adoption of state SEL standards, many districts in Illinois, including D1234, are not in compliance with state or district policy in regard to the provision of SEL. That said, students across the state are missing a major component of 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum, SEL. In the sections that follow I will be looking at this problem through five lenses including; educational analysis, economic analysis, social analysis, political analysis, and moral/ethical analysis.

### **Educational Analysis**

In 2011, CASEL and collaborating researchers exposed breakthrough discoveries with the publication of a meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs, primarily covering three decades of research. They found that SEL interventions that address the five competencies of SEL increased students' academic performance by 11 percentile points, as compared to students who did not participate in such SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011). In addition, the SEL programs also reduced aggression and emotional distress among students, increased helping behaviors in school, and improved positive attitudes toward self and others. As such, research reviews and meta-analyses find that well-designed, well-implemented SEL programs are associated with positive social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes for children and adolescents (Durlak et al., 2011).

Most recently, authors of the 2011 meta-analysis have completed a new meta-analysis (2017) published in the peer-reviewed journal *Child Development*. The study analyzed results

from 82 different interventions involving more than 97,000 students from kindergarten to high school, and the effects were assessed six months to 18 years after the programs ended. The current study shows that school-based SEL interventions continue to benefit students for months and even years to come. More specifically, the research unveiled the following results (Taylor et. al., 2017):

- 3.5 years after the last intervention the academic performance of students exposed to SEL programs was an average 13 percentile points higher than their non-SEL peers, based on the eight studies that measured academic performance.
- At other follow-up periods, conduct problems, emotional distress, and drug use were all significantly lower for students exposed to SEL programs, and development of social and emotional skills and positive attitudes toward self, others, and school was higher.
- SEL continued to boost student well-being in the form of greater social and emotional competencies, prosocial behavior, and prosocial attitudes.
- SEL participants later demonstrated a 6% increase in high school graduation rates, and an 11% increase in college graduation rates.
- SEL participants were less likely to have a clinical mental health disorder, ever be arrested or become involved with the juvenile justice system, and had lower rates of sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancies. (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017)

Several studies incorporated in the 2011 and 2017 meta-analyses explore the short and long-term benefits of SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et. al. 2017). In one such example, researchers examined how SEL intervention programs (such as social skills training,

parent training with home visits, peer coaching, reading tutoring, and classroom social-emotional curricula) for kindergarten students impacted their adult lives, and found that these programs led to 10% (59% vs. 69% for the control group) fewer psychological, behavioral, or substance abuse problems at the age of 25 (Dodge et al., 2014). Another study examined kindergarten teachers' ratings of their student's prosocial skills (e.g. kindness, sharing, and empathy) and discovered a strong correlation to adult outcomes such as greater educational attainment, stronger employment, and better mental health, in addition to reduced criminal activity and substance use (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015).

As evidenced by the latest research (Taylor et. al., 2017) school-based SEL interventions have demonstrated a lasting positive effect in the lives of students. That said, with so much falling on teacher's plates these days, such as Common Core, new curricular programs, and differentiation for inclusive classrooms, many teachers view SEL as one more thing added to an already full plate. As a teacher with over 15 years of classroom experience, I fully understand the unprecedented extent of demands in the teaching profession. However, as stewards of public education charged with doing what is best for students, the case must be made for the advocacy and implementation of SEL. Instead of seeing SEL as another thing added to the plate, one must understand that SEL *is* the plate.

When viewing policy advocacy of SEL from an educational standpoint, it is important to consider the person-centered reasons SEL can promote academic success. When speaking of person-centered reasons, I am speaking of the two SEL competencies that refer to self; self-management and self-awareness. Within self-management lies self-regulation, the ability to control and manage thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and self-regulation has been linked to academic achievement in numerous studies (Vega, 2012). Students who are more self-aware and

confident in their learning capacities try harder and persist in the face of challenges (Aronson, 2002 as cited in Durlak et al., 2011). Likewise, students who set high academic goals, have self-discipline, motivate themselves, manage stress, and organize their approach to work learn more and get better grades (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Elliot & Dweck, 2005; cited in Durlak et al., 2011). Finally, students who use problem-solving skills to overcome obstacles and make responsible decisions about studying and completing homework do better academically (Zins & Elias, 2006; cited in Durlak et al., 2011).

### **Economic Analysis**

When looking at policy and advocacy of SEL in D1234, through an economic analysis, there are multiple factors that come into play. To begin, there is the PD cost of implementing SEL district-wide. More specifically, there is a cost involved in developing and maintaining an SEL Task Force, providing district-wide PD to inform and educate all staff in SEL programming and curriculum, and appointment of an SEL district coordinator to lead the district, progress monitor, and assess SEL practices district-wide. Additionally, there is a cost involved in purchasing an SEL program and materials for the district. As such, implementation of an SEL program district-wide can be costly and requires a sizeable financial commitment by the district.

Historically, District 1234 has demonstrated their financial commitment to SEL since the passage of School Board Policy 6:65 in 2010. In other words, the district supported hiring an Emotional Wellness Coordinator, and providing five stipends for EWC building Mentors. Additionally, there was an EWC district budget of \$4,000 per year, and \$500 per school per year. With continued focus on social and emotional wellness, and articulation of SEL skills and competencies, the case was made that D1234 students could benefit from the implementation of district-wide SEL. In 2016-2017, there has been a resurgence of the district commitment to

support and prioritize SEL district-wide. This resurgence of support for SEL can be evidenced by the formation of an SEL Administrative Team and a district-wide SEL Task Force.

The SEL Administrative Team is comprised of the Associate Superintendent, the Executive Director of Student Services, a building principal, a consultant from the Charmm'd Foundation, a school social worker, and myself, the district Emotional Wellness Coordinator. The district SEL Task Force is a group of 30 staff members representative of all grade levels and subject areas district-wide. The SEL Administrative Team coordinated a full-day pull out for the SEL Task Force in January, 2017. In March, 2017 The SEL Administrative Team coordinated a follow-up ½ Day Workshop. Our intention in hosting these two workshops was primarily to inform the SEL Task Force on all fronts of SEL; What is SEL? History of SEL in D1234, results from the SEL Audit in D1234, current research in SEL, state and local SEL policy, and most importantly, our mission to implement SEL district-wide in D1234.

From an economic standpoint, D1234 fully supported the formation of both the SEL Administrative Team and the SEL Task Force. The January full day SEL Task Force pull out was conducted during a regular school day. The expense of having 30 staff members out of class for a full day was a costly measure, approximately \$3,500. This figure was arrived at by approximating one hundred dollars per substitute, multiplied by the 30 attendees, and includes breakfast bites and lunch which were provided by the district. Fortunately, the March SEL Task Force ½ Day Workshop was provided as an option during a district institute day, and was led by the SEL Administrative Team, so there was no additional cost to the district.

The PD component of introducing the SEL initiative is a critical, and costly step which serves to provide all district staff members with essential information regarding SEL. As Allan Odden points out, "Every study of improving schools and districts identifies intensive, long-

term, and ongoing professional development as a critical ingredient” (Odden, 2012, pg. 66). That said, the SEL Administrative Team has taken great care in planning SEL PD in the most cost-effective manner. In February 2017, I conducted two district-wide PD presentations on the nuts and bolts of SEL during staff institute days. As suggested by Odden, the most cost effective, opportunistic times to offer PD are summer training institutes, on-site coaching for staff, working collaboratively as a team of teachers during planning periods, and ongoing training during district institute days (Odden, 2012).

In addition to PD expenses associated with district-wide implementation of SEL, is the actual purchasing of a research based SEL curricular program. For the purpose of this advocacy piece, I will recommend using Second Step, a research-based, sequenced curriculum created by Committee for Children, that teaches essential life and learning skills. Second Step is a media-rich program that engages students and reinforces positive behavior. Second Step provides fully scripted lessons that are easy to integrate, follow, and incorporate into a typical school day. Second Step also provides take-home materials which help to bolster family engagement and support of the themes and topics that students are working on (CASEL, 2016). One huge benefit to purchasing Second Step is that they provide interactive training which helps expedite implementation, consistency, and alignment. The financial breakdown of purchasing Second Step is as follows can be seen below in Table 1.

Table 1.

*D1234 Forecasted Expenditures for K-8 SEL Program, Second Step*

<u>Item</u>	<u>Cost</u>
K - 5 Second Step Bundle Suite (\$4,299 multiplied by 3 schools = \$12,897)	\$12,897

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Site Streaming License (\$1,599 multiplied by 3 = \$4,797)	\$4,797
Principal Tool Kit (\$298 multiplied by 3 = \$894)	\$894
Supplemental resources (\$500 multiplied by 3 = \$1,500)	\$1,500
Second Step Middle School Program School Wide License	\$2,499
\$199 Middle School Grade 6	\$597
\$199 Middle School Grade 7	
\$199 Middle School Grade 8	
TOTAL	\$23,184

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As mentioned above, there are significant costs to the district associated with the implementation of SEL district-wide. We tend to look at things from the initial cost factor; however, it is important to consider the potential future savings, or return on investment, as well. The positive outcomes of SEL implementation can often be translated into substantial monetary benefits for students and for society as a whole. For example, in Promoting Positive Youth Development Through School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Interventions: A Meta-Analysis of Follow-Up Effects, students who received SEL later demonstrated a 6% increase in high school graduation rates, and an 11% increase in college graduation rates. According to this study, a student who graduates from high school has a lifetime income benefit of \$367,687, and the prevention of a single case of conduct disorder saves society nearly \$4 million (Taylor et. al., 2017). In other research analyzing the economic impact of SEL programs, a research team from Columbia University found that on average, every dollar invested in SEL programming yields \$11 in long-term benefits, ranging from reduced juvenile crime, higher lifetime earnings, and better mental and physical health (Belfield et al., 2015).

**Social Analysis**

SEL, at the very core, is a matter of cultivating our self-awareness, which begins with an understanding of emotions (Zakrzewski, 2015). According to leading emotions expert Richard Davidson, our emotions work in tandem with our cognition in a seamless and integrated way to help us navigate the classroom, workplace, our relationships, and the decisions we make in life (Zakrzewski, 2015). Over the past decade, researchers in the field of emotions have discovered that negative emotions close people off, making them less available, less resilient, and unable to relate with and connect to others; positive emotions, on the other hand, such as gratitude, peace, love, and happiness come with countless positive benefits, such as a broadening of hearts and minds that helps people see our common humanity (Zakrzewski, 2015). The goal of SEL, in regard to emotions, is not to have all positive emotions all the time, rather, to have an awareness and understanding of one's own emotions, to be aware of the emotions of others, and to have the skills and ability to express emotions in healthy and productive ways. As students grow in awareness of their own emotions, they are better equipped to recognize and understand the emotions of others, which leads to compassion and empathy, two compelling and powerful emotions, and critical components of SEL.

A social analysis of policy advocacy of SEL in D1234 sheds light on a multitude of potential benefits from SEL program implementation. For example, students engaged in SEL are less aggressive and disruptive in school (Durlak et al., 2011). Additionally, students receiving SEL curriculum and instruction experience less emotional distress. Further, students who received SEL curriculum and instruction are reported to have fewer occurrences of depression, anxiety, stress and social withdrawal as evidenced by measures like the Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (Durlak et al., 2011). Studies affirm these benefits are long-term as students receiving SEL curriculum and instruction have 10% fewer psychological, behavioral, or

substance abuse problems when they reach the age of 25 (Durlak et al., 2011). This research is not surprising if you think about how differently a student might react to adversity or conflict if they have been taught the skills to do so. When students learn to find their voice and express their emotions appropriately and productively, a wide range of inappropriate and damaging behaviors can be averted.

As we look at SEL policy and advocacy through a social lens, we must not omit the outcome of positive social behavior and interpersonal skills. Students who received SEL curriculum and instruction were reported by fellow students, teachers, parents, and independent observers to get along better with their peers (Durlak et al., 2011). As proponents of SEL would agree, interpersonal skills and self-awareness, which are essential for developing and maintaining positive, productive relationships with peers, parents and teachers are quintessential elements of an SEL program of instruction (Durlak et al., 2011). In my experience as a classroom teacher, I have seen firsthand how interpersonal relationships; student to student, student to teacher, and teacher to teacher relationships not only impact the school culture, but also drive connection, authenticity, and engagement and can lead to better academic performance and social and emotional wellbeing in school. Strong interpersonal relationships lead to developing a healthy sense of self, increased self-confidence, and therefore a reduction in students feeling isolated, or withdrawn.

SEL programming in schools, viewed from a social analysis, has the potential to be a catalyst for a paradigm shift in the purpose of education. “Instead of using education as a tool to satisfy our self-serving, competitive needs—such as making as much money as possible, particularly through unethical means and to the detriment of others—education will be seen as a tool to serve the greater good. Our educational practices and environments will shift towards

nurturing the long-term well-being and happiness of students who, through their own experience of being cared for, will naturally care for those around them. And students who understand how to care for themselves and others will be better equipped to care for the world” (Zakrzewski, 2015).

### **Political Analysis**

Federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTT) not only sidetracked our educational institutions with the standardized testing frenzy, they have temporarily blinded us to what is truly important in the education of our students, that is the students themselves. In this section I will be framing policy and advocacy of SEL through three political lenses; federal, state, and district. First, I will describe the most recent and influential federal legislation in education; NCLB, RTT, and Every Child Succeeds Act. As I have already given an in depth account of the major milestones in the development of the Illinois state SEL Standards, I will not repeat that information in this section. Lastly, I will address the steps taken by D1234 in an effort to comply with state legislation as it relates to SEL.

In the wake of recent federal legislation such as, NCLB and RTT, standardized testing and accountability have come to rule the educational arena. These aforementioned laws made testing the driver of federal educational policy and curriculum (Ravitch, 2010). Since the passing of NCLB, education has increasingly focused on teaching math and reading standards to improve academic achievement scores, almost to the total exclusion of SEL (Hamilton et al. 2007). Consequently, schools have seen behavioral problems increase (Eisenbraun, 2007), the notion of physical safety in schools has decreased, (Eaton, Kann, et al. 2008) and there have been no significant academic gains (CEBP, 2002; CEP, June 2007; ED 2000; Heaviside, Rowland, Williams, & Farris, 1999; Perie, Grigg, & Dion, 2005; Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005).

## **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)**

It should be noted that the United States is the only high performing nation in the world that tests every child every year (Ravitch, 2010). Let it also be known that “standardized tests are not a scientific instrument and that they are subject to many kinds of error: statistical error, measurement error, random error, and human error” (Ravitch, 2010, pg. xlii-xliii). We have seen schools and districts give way to adages such as “what gets measured, matters,” and “what is measured is treasured,” as well as, “what gets reported, gets supported.” Under NCLB, only two content areas were tested; math and reading. As a result, many schools responded by taking a laser focus approach to teaching math and reading, and steering away from curriculum areas that were not being tested. The value of art, music, world languages, drama, and physical education began to pale in comparison to math and reading, evidenced by the trend of doubling the time allotment for math and reading. This hyper-focus on math and reading shifted any previous notion of a well-rounded, balanced approach to education, to a curriculum that was centered on standardized test content.

NCLB meant that schools were being judged by their test scores, and this provoked a movement to rethink and restructure the curriculum in every effort to raise test scores. As a result, NCLB produced an unanticipated narrowing of the curriculum, teachers teaching to the test, and the omission of many subject areas including, in my opinion, the most important one of all, SEL. Ravitch boldly professes, and I concur, “the goal of schools should not be raising test scores, as the federal government has demanded since the passage of NCLB, but diligent attention to the intellectual, social and emotional development of their students” (Ravitch, 2010, p. xxxix).

SEL is often viewed as education of the whole child. In the wake of No Child Left Behind legislation, it seems our nation's schools are clawing to the top as they compete to maximize their performance on standardized tests. James Warren (2010) warns that caution must be taken amidst all this value being placed on high stakes standardized testing. These test scores are great measures of who is a good test taker, and which teachers have been diligently teaching to the test. However, one thing that standardized tests cannot and do not capture is a student's character and social emotional skill set. According to Warren, these skills are often what enable students to turn academic knowledge into know-how. Social and emotional skills and competencies which are rarely measured, are essential, and include motivation, grit, the ability to collaborate with others, the ability to focus, self-regulation, self-management, self-confidence, and the ability to defer gratification (Warren, 2010). According to James Warren, the purpose of education is what it has always been: to develop a well-rounded, intellectual, and adaptable person; to create upward mobility through knowledge and character (Warren, 2010).

### **Race to the Top (RTT)**

President Obama's RTT initiative came about in 2012 offering bold incentives to states willing to promote the development of systemic reform to improve teaching and learning in America's schools. There were both positive and negative repercussions stemming from this initiative. On the bright side, to date, RTT has dedicated over \$4 billion to 19 states that developed vigorous plans addressing the following four areas of K-12 education reform:

- Development of rigorous standards and better assessments
- Adoption of better data systems to provide schools, teachers, and parents with information about student progress
- Support for teachers and school leaders to become more effective

- Increased emphasis and resources for the rigorous interventions needed to turn around the lowest-performing schools.

(<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/education/k-12/race-to-the-top>)

Forty-six states along with Washington DC threw their hats in the ring by submitting in-depth reform plans to enter in this new competition. To date, only 19 of the 46 states have received RTT funding; however, the other states have followed through with modifications of state education laws and policies to catalyze needed change (Race to the Top). A major accomplishment of RTT was that it brought 48 states together in an effort to establish a discretionary set of rigorous standards that would ensure students are college and career ready.

Attempts to incorporate a business model in our school systems using competition, bottom lines, profits, and losses, returns on investment, take overs, and firing those teachers who did not meet their targets are widespread. But, as Diane Ravitch points out, “school is not a ‘race to the top’. The goal of education is human development, not profits” (Ravitch, 2010, pg. xxxi). Ravitch goes on to say that, “A teacher’s job is to awaken a love for learning in students, to promote ethical behavior and self-discipline, and to guide those students who need extra help” (2010).

Clearly standardized testing can be used to measure certain dimensions of learning; however, Ravitch argues, and I concur, that these tests fail to measure what matters most. Standardized testing “cannot measure originality, imagination, character, honesty, industriousness, integrity, persistence, creativity, diligence, kindness, courage, and scores of other traits and skills that matter more for making a good life than the ability to guess the right bubble” (Ravitch, 2010, pg. xxxi). If we as a society are to put what is best for students first, the American education system needs a “different paradigm, one that minimizes the importance of

standardized testing” (Ravitch, 2010, pg. xxxix) and maximizes the development of the whole child. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that our schools are not being run as businesses, that test scores are not measured as profits curriculum is not being narrowed to teaching to the test, and finally, that our students are not being programmed to be test expert taking machines.

### **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**

The most recent education reform, ESSA was signed by President Obama in 2015. This bipartisan measure reauthorizes the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), America’s national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students (US Department of Education). According to Ulrich Boser, senior fellow at the Center for American Progress (CAP), “This law calls for a well-rounded education and a shifting away from the narrow focus on academics,” (Rosales, 2017). While ESSA does not mention SEL, the law did replace references to “core academic subjects,” instead calling for a “well-rounded education” for all students (Rosales, 2017). Not only does ESSA call for a well-rounded education, there are also new funds available under the legislation for PD in this area. ESSA has bolstered the status of SEL in schools, districts, and the nation. “The emphasis for so long has been placed on academic performance and academic content mastery,” said Rebecca Snyder of the National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY), “I’m really encouraged by the shifts (in teaching) where we are taking more of a whole child orientation (while) focusing on social and emotional learning” (Rosales, 2017).

In recent years, SEL has gained steam as ESSA has helped to legitimize schools taking the time and devoting resources to teaching the whole child, with more value being placed on SEL skills and competencies. Because of this, we have seen an uptick in interest and attention to SEL, Emotional Intelligence, soft skills, noncognitive skills, and interpersonal skills. Berkeley’s

Greater Good Education Director, Vicki Zakrzewski writes, “Social Emotional Learning is spreading like wildfire—and not just in the United States. Countries such as the U.K., Singapore, and China are starting to implement SEL in their schools as well” (Zakrzewski, 2015). There are a number of reasons why schools are turning their attention toward SEL, all of which are backed by large volumes of research. Schools are seeking out SEL programs to “increase academic success and, somewhat ironically, to lower the stress-levels of students as they strive towards that success; to prevent negative behaviors such as drug use, violence, and bullying; to equip students with the ‘soft skills’ they will need in today’s work environment; and to promote positive relationships and attitudes about school” (Zakrzewski, 2015).

With ESSA in place at the federal level, SEL standards at the state level, and school board policy in place at the local level, why are so many schools still not teaching SEL? Where is the accountability in teaching and learning SEL? What is the point in having state standards and district policy if there are no systems in place for accountability? How can we be certain that students are receiving quality SEL curriculum and instruction as mandated by Illinois state law and District 1234?

In most districts, the major political players are the Board of Education, the parent community, the staff, and the administration. As mentioned earlier, the Board of Education in D1234 developed a policy in 2010 to incorporate SEL into the educational program district-wide. District 1234 has a very supportive and involved parent community which, for the most part, is in agreement that D1234 schools should be teaching SEL. In a survey that was given to D1234 staff in 2017, one hundred percent of the staff members reported that they felt it is important for students to develop greater SEL competencies and awareness (Correa, 2017). Additionally, the administration in D1234 has demonstrated a renewed commitment to the incorporation of SEL in

the educational program with plans for district-wide implementation of SEL. This commitment is evidenced by the formation of the K-8 SEL Task Force which is charged with acting as a fully representative decision making body in the SEL implementation process. It is with great pride that I write at present that there is definitely consensus in the district to incorporate SEL programming district-wide.

### **Moral and Ethical Analysis**

In this section I will be framing policy and advocacy of SEL in D1234 through a moral and ethical analysis. The moral and ethical lens, as it related to teaching our students SEL skills and competencies, is a compelling one. As you have read, the research overwhelmingly suggests that with SEL programs intact, schools start to see more of the behavior that we aspire to, and less inappropriate, damaging behaviors. As we continue to prepare our students to succeed personally and professionally in the twenty-first century and beyond, we must incorporate effective, research based, social emotional programming in the curriculum. As with any area of competence that we want our students to improve upon, we must advocate for what is best for students, and in this case, that means advocating for the allocation of funds for SEL programming, leading by example and prioritizing the moral and ethical obligation we have to teach the whole child, modeling and training for consistency among staff, and fully embracing district wide implementation of SEL curriculum just as we would any new Math or English Language Arts curriculum adoption.

I would like to illustrate the moral and ethical obligation we have to educate the whole child using a new study by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, in collaboration with the Baltimore Education Research Consortium. The study to which I will be referring to was cited in an article titled, New Study Links Kindergarten Social-Emotional Skills to Long-Term Success,

by Aaron Loewenberg. Loewenberg, a former kindergarten teacher in Washington DC, shared how testing his kindergarten students at the beginning of each school year summoned meaningful revelations. To explain, he assessed incoming kindergarten students to identify what skills they were entering with, as well as what skills they were deficient in. The assessment consisted of identification of numbers, letters, sounds, and also, social emotional skills.

Loewenberg confessed that students lacking number, letter and sound knowledge were the least of his concerns. He reported, “The students that did worry me were the ones who started kindergarten lacking important social-emotional skills. Students lacking social-emotional skills experience challenges in following directions, managing their emotions, and getting along with other children and the adults that share their classroom” (Loewenberg, 2016, para. 2). As an educator, Loewenberg knew from experience that SEL skills were far more of a challenge to instill in students than basic math and literacy skills.

The study Loewenberg wrote about provided further evidence of his observations as a classroom teacher, students who were lacking important social-emotional skills are more likely than their peers to experience negative school outcomes (Loewenberg, 2016). The study to which Loewenberg wrote about examined the relationship between the social emotional readiness of kindergarten students and key educational outcomes in more than 9,000 elementary school students in Baltimore City Public Schools. The study measured social emotional skills against the Personal and Social Development domain of the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR). The Social Development domain of the MMSR includes indicators such as, “Follows classroom rules and routines” and “Participates cooperatively in group activities” (Loewenberg, 2016). Teachers observed and reported on student behavior as “Not Ready” or “Ready.” Researchers reported that students rated as “Not Ready” were more likely to be male, low-

income, and less likely to have gone to pre-K. But what is more relevant to the purpose of SEL advocacy, is that after tracking these students through fourth grade, students who were, “Not Ready” were up to 80% more likely to have been retained; up to 80% more likely to require special education services; and up to *seven times* more likely to be suspended or expelled at least once (Loewenberg, 2016).

The aforementioned study reveals that not only does SEL play a significant role in education, there are some major implications supposing that students who do not begin kindergarten with SEL skills and competencies are at a major risk for retention, requiring special education services, and being on the receiving end of severe disciplinary measures. Interestingly enough, the researchers found that the most predictable characteristic that all three of these outcomes had in common was being a male student. “Notably, social-emotional readiness in kindergarten was a significant predictor of grade retention even after controlling for student scores on the other readiness domains of the MMSR, such as language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, and physical development and health” (Loewenberg, 2016).

It should be noted that this study has limitations in that it was not a nationally representative sample, and the MMSR that teachers used to rate students is a subjective measure. What we can learn from this research is that students who enter kindergarten deficient in social emotional skills and development are more likely than their peers to experience negative school outcomes and if we are to ignore the social emotional deficits of our students, we could ultimately be paying the price in the long run in the form of grade retention and special education services (Loewenberg, 2016). Thus, I am not suggesting that we use this one sample study from Baltimore to conclude that there is a moral and ethical imperative to educate the whole child, I

am instead, adding this study to the existing volume of SEL research that implores all stewards of public education to act in the best interest of our children; teach the whole child.

### **Section Three: Advocated Policy Statement**

In this section, I will be providing a definition of D1234 school board policy 6:65 Student Social and Emotional Development. Additionally, I will be presenting the the Illinois State Board of Education SEL Standards. I will describe what these policies and standards are advocating for in detail by spelling out the goals objectives. Intertwined in this description, I will discuss whose needs, values, and preferences are being represented by the policy and standards. Finally, I will be describing the basis upon which the goals and objectives of these policies and standards are validated to be appropriate and good.

#### **D1234 School Board Policy 6:65 Student Social and Emotional Development**

To begin, September 28, 2010, six years after the state of Illinois adopted state learning standards for SEL, district 1234 adopted school board policy 6:65 student social and emotional development. This policy states that SEL, consistent with the Illinois State Learning Standards, shall be incorporated into District 1234's educational program. As can be seen by the language of Board Policy 6:65, students' needs, and an explicit value in student social and emotional wellbeing are central to the objectives of this policy.

School Board Policy 6:65 states five objectives for addressing the social and emotional needs of students. The first objective is to enhance students' school readiness, academic success, and use of good citizenship skills. Objective number two is to foster a safe, supportive learning environment where students feel respected and valued. This safe supportive learning environment requires staff to be actively involved in SEL as they are clearly an integral part of the learning environment. The third objective, again, directly involving staff, is to teach social

and emotional skills to all students. The fourth objective is to partner with families and the community to promote students' social and emotional development. And the final objective is to prevent or minimize mental health problems in students (District 1234 School Board Policy 6:65).

School Board Policy 6:65 lays the perfect foundation for advocating for SEL in District 1234. This policy will be used as both an anchor as well as the springboard for my SEL policy advocacy. In terms of being the anchor, policy 6:65 demonstrates that District 1234 is clearly not starting from scratch in the world of SEL. As a matter of fact, the pre-existing board policy is the perfect foundation upon which to build a program. And as for the springboard, the fact that School Board Policy 6:65 already exists should smooth the path for launching district-wide implementation of SEL. School Board Policy 6:65, coupled with the Illinois State SEL Standards, will be used as a north star in terms of guiding D1234's implementation process. The combination of federal legislation, state standards, and existing district policy are ideal in terms of facilitating district-wide implementation of SEL.

Interestingly enough, School Board Policy 6:65 has been in place for seven years, the same amount of time that I have been working in the District 1234. I have seen firsthand the previous Emotional Wellness Coordinator's genuine efforts to bring district-wide, organic, research based, consistent SEL programming to D1234 schools. Unfortunately, an abrupt job loss of the coordinator proved to derail the momentum. In my three years of serving as the district Emotional Wellness Coordinator (.5 position), I have tried to get D1234 back on track and rally the support of district administration, staff, and the community at large to prioritize SEL in D1234. This has not been easy. With administrative turnover, lack of enforcement and compliance of School Board Policy 6:65, general inconsistency in levels of support for SEL in

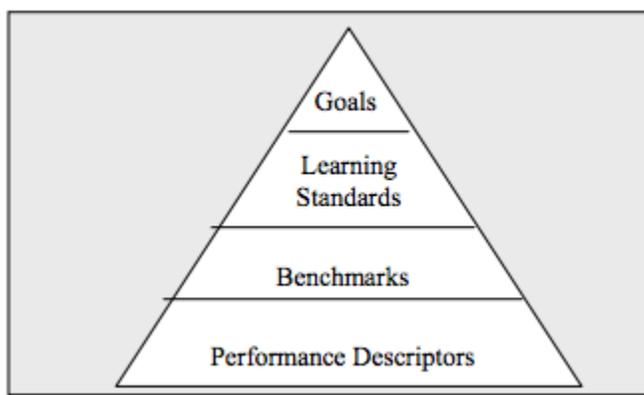
schools across the district, and other competing initiatives such as new curriculum adoption, and incorporation of Common Core standards, keeping SEL in the forefront of the conversation has been an uphill journey. The nation as a whole has witnessed a recent uptick in accountability with the adoption of Common Core curriculum, and as a result, there is a hyperfocus on curriculum, assessment, and standardized test scores. District-wide adoption of new curriculum in math, reading, and writing has teachers feeling overwhelmed and with little time and energy to dedicate to SEL. This among other things has historically posed a challenge for district-wide implementation of SEL.

Despite the uphill battle of implementation of SEL district-wide, the Emotional Wellness Committees in District 1234 have remained strong, intact, and true to their purpose. And although historically District 1234 has not been fully compliant with School Board Policy 6:65, or the Illinois State Standards in SEL, last year, SY 2016-2017, we saw a change in leadership influence the status of SEL in D1234. With a new Associate Superintendent, who was instrumental in bringing SEL to her former district, we are seeing the pendulum swing in a more favorable direction in terms of district-wide implementation of SEL. I will describe this movement in greater detail in the policy implementation section of this paper. That said, in SY 2017-2018, we have plans in place to make great strides in changing the tide and prioritizing SEL in D1234.

### **Illinois State Board of Education Social Emotional Learning Standards**

The Illinois State Board of Education was the first state in the nation to adopt SEL standards in 2004 (CASEL, 2016). The Illinois SEL state standards both set a precedent as well as set an accountability standard for teaching social emotional learning. The fact that Illinois has written SEL standards into law validates that SEL is valued and is just as important as any other

subject matter that we are teaching our students in Illinois schools. The Illinois SEL Standards describe the content and skills for students in grades K - 12 for Social and Emotional Learning. See Appendix A for a full copy of the Illinois State SEL Standards. In the state of Illinois there are three SEL goals, 10 standards, benchmarks, and performance descriptors (See Figure 3). The 10 SEL learning standards are specific statements of the knowledge and skills within a goal that students should know and be able to do. Together, the state standards define the learning needed to achieve the goals, but each standard is general enough to apply to learning across the entire range of grade-level clusters. Specifically, the state standards are broader learning targets used to align SEL curriculum, instruction, and assessment (ISBE Introduction, Design for SEL Standards).



*Figure 3.* Illinois State Board of Education design for SEL standards.

Each SEL standard includes five benchmark levels that describe what students should know and be able to do in early elementary (grades K - 3), late elementary (grades 4 - 5), middle/junior high (grades 6-8), early high school (grades 9-10), and late high school (grades 11-12) (See Figure 4). These standards build on the Illinois Social/Emotional Development Standards of the Illinois Early Learning Standards (ISBE Introduction, Design for SEL Standards). The SEL standards have been developed in accordance with Section 15(a) of Public Act 93-0495, which calls upon the Illinois State Board of Education to “develop and implement a

plan to incorporate social and emotional development standards as part of the Illinois Learning Standards” (Illinois General Assembly, Public Act 093-0495).

**Social Emotional Learning Standards**

<p><b>Goal 1: Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.</b></p>	<p><b>Why this goal is important:</b> Several key sets of skills and attitudes provide a strong foundation for achieving school and life success. One involves knowing your emotions, how to manage them, and ways to express them constructively. This enables one to handle stress, control impulses, and motivate oneself to persevere in overcoming obstacles to goal achievement. A related set of skills involves accurately assessing your abilities and interests, building strengths, and making effective use of family, school, and community resources. Finally, it is critical for students to be able to establish and monitor their progress toward achieving academic and personal goals.</p>
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<b>Learning Standard</b>	<b>Early Elementary</b>	<b>Late Elementary</b>	<b>Middle/Jr. High</b>	<b>Early H.S.</b>	<b>Late H.S.</b>
<b>A. Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior.</b>	<b>1A.1a.</b> Recognize and accurately label emotions and how they are linked to behavior.	<b>1A.2a.</b> Describe a range of emotions and the situations that cause them.	<b>1A.3a.</b> Analyze factors that create stress or motivate successful performance.	<b>1A.4a.</b> Analyze how thoughts and emotions affect decision making and responsible behavior.	<b>1A.5a.</b> Evaluate how expressing one’s emotions in different situations affects others.
	<b>1A.1b.</b> Demonstrate control of impulsive behavior.	<b>1A.2b.</b> Describe and demonstrate ways to express emotions in a socially acceptable manner.	<b>1A.3b.</b> Apply strategies to manage stress and to motivate successful performance.	<b>1A.4b.</b> Generate ways to develop more positive attitudes.	<b>1A.5b.</b> Evaluate how expressing more positive attitudes influences others.

*Figure 4.* Illinois State Board of Education SEL Goal one with standards and benchmarks

As mentioned above, each SEL standard contains five benchmarks. The SEL benchmarks are learning targets that are more specific and give greater detail to help define the state standards. Benchmarks specify developmentally appropriate SEL knowledge and skills for each standard in all five grade-level clusters. The benchmarks are not intended to be all-inclusive; instead they highlight essential descriptions giving greater detail of each standard that instruction should emphasize at each grade-cluster (ISBE Introduction, Design for SEL Standards). As one can see by the sample above in Figure 4, SEL benchmarks increase in developmental sophistication and become more rigorous from one grade-level cluster to the next (ISBE

Introduction, Design for SEL Standards). It is important to note that the SEL benchmarks are not solely intended to be taught in isolation, rather, as CASEL suggests, a combination of direct teaching and embedding these lessons in an integrated way proves to be the most successful (CASEL, 2016).

Lastly, SEL performance descriptors (See Figure 5) are the most specific learning targets that build upon the standards and benchmarks (ISBE Introduction, Design for SEL Standards). Performance descriptors are intended to help educators select, adopt or create curricula including classroom activities, instruction, and assessments, both performance-based and other assessments aligned with the standards. Performance descriptors are also helpful in mapping curriculum or validating what a school or district has already developed and implemented (ISBE Introduction, Design for SEL Standards). Performance descriptors offer a representative, rather than exhaustive, list of learning targets that provide greater detail of the specific SEL knowledge, reasoning, and skills highlighted in the standards (ISBE Introduction, Design for SEL Standards).

## Social Emotional Learning Performance Descriptors

### 1A Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.

Stage A	Stage B	Stage C
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify emotions (e.g., happy, surprised, sad, angry, proud, afraid) expressed in "feeling faces" or photographs.</li> <li>2. Name the emotions felt by characters in stories.</li> <li>3. Identify ways to calm yourself.</li> <li>4. Describe a time you felt the same way a story character felt.</li> <li>5. Discuss classroom and school rules.</li> <li>6. Share feelings (e.g., through speaking, writing, drawing) in a range of contexts.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describe how various situations make you feel.</li> <li>2. Describe your physical responses to strong emotions.</li> <li>3. Recognize that feelings change throughout the day.</li> <li>4. Demonstrate patience in a variety of situations.</li> <li>5. Demonstrate a range of emotions through facial expressions and body language.</li> <li>6. Practice self talk to calm yourself.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify a range of emotions you have experienced.</li> <li>2. Describe situations that trigger various emotions (e.g., listening to music, talking to a friend, taking a test, being scolded).</li> <li>3. Recognize mood changes and factors that contribute to them.</li> <li>4. Depict a range of emotions (e.g., make a poster, draw a picture, participate in a role play).</li> <li>5. Distinguish among intensity levels of an emotion.</li> <li>6. Demonstrate ways to deal with upsetting emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, disappointment).</li> <li>7. Practice deep breathing to calm yourself.</li> </ol>

Figure 5. Illinois State Board of Education social emotional learning performance descriptors.

### Goals and Objectives

The goals of the Illinois State Social Emotional Learning Standards are as follows: Goal 1: Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success. Goal 2: Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships. Goal 3: Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts (Illinois State Board of Education Social Emotional Learning Goals). These goals combine seamlessly with the SEL objectives set forth by District 1234 which are as follows; Objective 1: To enhance students' school readiness, academic success, and use of good citizenship skills. Objective 2: To foster a safe, supportive learning environment where students feel respected and valued. Objective 3: To teach social and emotional skills to all students.

Objective 4: To partner with families and the community to promote students' social and emotional development. Objective 5: To prevent or minimize mental health problems in students (District 1234 School Board Policy 6:65).

As declared by the objectives of School Board Policy 6:65 and the Illinois State SEL standards, it is evident that the needs, values, and preferences of all stakeholder groups are being represented by the SEL policy and standards for which I am advocating. Additionally, there is strong evidence suggesting that not only does SEL programming directly benefit the students, it also has positive impact on the staff as well as the culture of the school (Zacrzewski, 2015).

Vicki Zacrzewski, Education Director at the Greater Good Science Centre at UC Berkley, shared in the Berkley Blog that research clearly shows that SEL programming boasts a host of benefits for the teachers who are delivering the SEL lessons. Zacrzewski (2015) described the impact of SEL as transformational in regard to the inner lives of teacher well-being.

I am currently working collaboratively with the high school Wellness Coordinator to articulate a continuum of SEL curriculum and programming from kindergarten through twelfth grade. I have found a kindred spirit in my colleague in terms of extraordinary passion for SEL, Mindfulness, Positive Psychology, and well-being. In a recent conversation, we spoke about the importance of staff development in SEL and well-being. This conversation reminded me of the work of Vicki Zacrzewski of Berkley's Greater Good, Science Based Insights for a Meaningful Life. Zacrzewski has written extensively on the benefits of engaging staff in self-awareness and self-care. "Well-being is one of the major outcomes for educators who cultivate their own social-emotional skills" (Zacrzewski, 2014, para. 10). In a world where teacher attrition rates are skyrocketing, "a whopping 50 percent in the first five years, teacher self-care is crucial, if not imperative, for the profession" (Zacrzewski, 2014, para. 10). Zacrzewski encourages educational

systems and communities to focus on staff development in SEL. Zaczewski points out that, “As teachers, one of the best things about developing our own social-emotional skills is that we can then turn around and help our students do the same thing” (Zaczewski, 2013, para.22). Again, the analogy of airplane oxygen masks comes to mind in that we must first tend to ourselves so that we will have the ability to tend to others.

#### **Section Four: Policy Argument**

When schools elect not to teach students critical skills in self management, self awareness, social awareness, decision making, and relationship skills, they are doing a terrible disservice their students and the whole of society. Hanna Melnick, of the Learning Policy Institute, speaks on the importance of including SEL. She argues that with as much as we know about the science of learning and development, not teaching students these (SEL) skills is not just wrong-headed, but could actually undermine students’ academic achievement. “For students to learn academically, schools must also support their social and emotional development” (Melnick, 2017, para. 1). That said, we must proceed with caution, as “mandating SEL without a deeper understanding and personal experience of its impact serves no one” (Zaczewski, 2014, para. 31).

Many sceptics claim that taking time out of class to address SEL is a waste of time. Similarly, there are many teachers who feel that direct teaching of SEL is not their expertise, and therefore comes off in a way that is scripted and not authentic. On the other hand, many teachers are under the misconception that if they are kind, responsive teachers who value their relationships with students, then they are incorporating SEL. This is simply not the case. Teachers with the best of intentions are failing to recognize that SEL is comprised of a specific set of skills and competencies. All too often, teachers believe that they are already teaching SEL,

despite their lack of knowledge of the SEL standards. It is not just about being a compassionate teacher, research suggests that the most effective way to incorporate SEL in an educational program is the combination of direct instruction and embedding lessons across the curriculum (CASEL, 2015). The educational community needs to understand that SEL is not just holding hands and singing Kumbaya. SEL programs follow legitimate, research-based curriculum with a scope and sequence.

In combing the internet for articles against the teaching of SEL skills and competencies in schools, I was happy to find so little. In fact, the only thing I found was a blog that led me to believe that the author was against SEL titled, “The Manipulation of Social Emotional Learning.” In this blog, Larry Ferlazzo, a self-identified supporter of SEL, communicates his worry that SEL is being taken out of context. Ferlazzo reports that “School reformers in Los Angeles are using SEL terms (they even call their report, True Grit) to justify pushing performance pay for teachers and rewards for students, as well as advocating for an increased emphasis on being data-driven (instead of being data-informed) through the use of dynamic data.” (Ferlazzo, 2016, para. 5). Ferlazzo also speaks out about KIPP schools usage of what he calls, “the destructive strategy of grading character traits”(Ferlazzo, 2016, para. 5). Lastly, Ferlazzo points out how, “New York Times columnist, David Brooks, is manipulating the good in SEL by proclaiming that Social Emotional Learning and training average parents to become better ones will take care of everything” (Ferlazzo, 2016, para. 5). Ferlazzo seems to be criticizing the way that the media and politicians are reducing genuine SEL to simply checking boxes by implementing a program and providing a parent education component.

As you can see by Ferlazzo’s bones of contention, his opposition is not directed toward SEL, it is aimed at the people and organizations who he feels are manipulating the terms and

goals of SEL. Ferlazzo presents research that suggests poverty interferes with one’s proficiency in SEL skills and competencies. “People aren’t poor because they don’t have self-control or grit — poverty itself helps create a lack of those qualities” (Ferlazzo, 2016, para. 7). With the multiple stresses and traumas inflicted upon children in poverty, Ferlazzo claims that these circumstances “make it more difficult to maintain the mental reserve needed for SEL skills” (Ferlazzo, 2016, para. 7). Ferlazzo closes by stating that, “None of these concerns, however, mean that we shouldn’t help our students develop these SEL skills in ways that are healthy for them, for their families, for us and for our schools.” (Ferlazzo, 2016, para. 8). Instead, “what these concerns do mean,” Ferlazzo (2016) suggests, “is that we should be vigilant about who is doing what and why they are doing it in the name of Social Emotional Learning” (Ferlazzo, 2016, para. 9).

### **The “Why” of SEL**

In previous sections, I have discussed the what of SEL. In this section, I will be focusing on the “why” of SEL. To anchor this description, I will be using the three Illinois State SEL Goals. Beginning with state goal number one, why is it important for students to develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success. According to the Illinois State Board of Education, “several key sets of skills and attitudes provide a strong foundation for achieving school and life success. One involves knowing your emotions, how to manage them, and ways to express them constructively. This enables one to handle stress, control impulses, and motivate oneself to persevere in overcoming obstacles to goal achievement” (ISBE SEL State Goals). A related set of self-awareness and self-management skills involves, “accurately assessing your abilities and interests, building strengths, and making effective use of family, school, and community resources” (ISBE SEL State Goals). It is

essential for students to be able to set both personal and academic goals, and monitor their progress toward achieving those goals (ISBE SEL State Goals).

Illinois State Goal number two aims to use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships. Why might this be important in the educational arena? Building and maintaining positive relationships with others is central to success in school and life because it requires the ability to recognize the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others, including those different from one's own. Additionally, establishing positive peer, family, and work relationships requires skills in cooperating, communicating respectfully, and constructively resolving conflicts with others (ISBE SEL State Goals).

Illinois State Goal number three revolves around the ability to demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts. Why are decision making skills important for students? Arming students with the ability to make informed, respectful, and responsible decisions based on their morals and values, safety, social norms, and potential consequences greatly enhances their wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. Promoting one's own health, avoiding risky behaviors, dealing honestly and fairly with others, and contributing to the good of one's classroom, school, family, community, and environment are essential to citizenship in a democratic society (CASEL, 2014). For students to realize these outcomes, they must have the capacity to make decisions and solve problems, generate alternative solutions, anticipate the consequences of their behaviors and decisions, and evaluate and learn from their own experiences (ISBE SEL State Goals).

All Illinois schools are mandated by law to assess the climate and culture of the school and publicize the findings at least every other year. In District 1234, the CSCI, a survey created by the National School Climate Center, is given annually to students and staff, and biennially to

parents. As such, SEL is being monitored and reported on by all stakeholder groups in the educational community including students, staff, parents, and community. When schools use culture and climate data to create positive learning environments, they are supporting the development of social emotional competencies and ethical dispositions that are predictive of school and life success (Cohen, 2006).

Schools typically implement universal Tier 1 prevention programs to improve the school climate and culture by focusing on social emotional wellbeing and the learning environment for students. As mentioned earlier in the work of Vicki Zakrzewski, current research alludes to the fact that these universal Tier 1 programs may also yield benefits for the individuals implementing the preventive programs, the staff (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). We tend to focus on the impact that SEL programming has on students, however, of equal importance is the effect SEL programs have on staff. There are a number of things that come to mind when thinking about how SEL benefits the staff. It is like the old adages, practice what you preach, walk the talk, do what I do, not what I say, and secure your own oxygen mask first before helping others.

Recent findings from a randomized control trial of a SEL and behavior management program indicated that the program substantially affected the teachers who implemented the program, as well as affecting the students in a positive way (Domitrovich et al., 2016). I find it important to share this aspect of SEL research in that bringing SEL programs into schools can be far more beneficial than just improving the social and emotional wellbeing of students, it is for the good of all. “When educators begin using SEL in the classroom, sometimes the most surprising outcome is how they personally change. Unless a teacher is an automaton, teaching students emotional and relationship skills compels a teacher to reflect on his or her own social-

emotional competencies—sometimes both in and out of the classroom” (Zakrzewski, 2017, para. 4).

When teachers begin cultivating social-emotional skills within themselves, it helps them to be more authentic in modeling these skills for students, which is an essential factor in successfully implementing SEL. According to Vicki Zakrzewski, “teachers who were required to teach an SEL program, but didn’t buy into what they were teaching, actually worsened their students’ social-emotional skills” (Zakrzewski, 2014, para. 7). On the other hand, Zakrzewski shares that other research suggests that “teachers who do develop these skills reap the rewards of greater mental health and more effective teaching, both of which have a huge impact on students’ success in school” (Zakrzewski, 2014, para. 7).

I will now share some direct quotes from teachers and administrators in Oakland Unified School District in California (OUSD) who have experienced firsthand the impact that implementing SEL had on them. Elementary school teacher Patricia Morris experienced firsthand the impact that teaching SEL had in her personal and professional life. In an interview with Zakrzewski, Morris shared that she had experienced profound changes as a result of implementing SEL in her classroom. “I’m calmer, more patient, kinder, and far less controlling,” described Morris. “I’m more focused and able to let little things go that before would’ve made me crazy. I’m also more willing to look for the reasons behind things that happen. And I’ve become more optimistic, so when anything terrible happens, I try to see what good might come out of it” (Zakrzewski, 2014, para. 5).

Middle school teacher, Mandi Ruud, not only taught and modeled SEL skills for her students, but she went as far as to ask her students for help in cultivating and monitoring these skills. In an interview with Zakrzewski, Ruud shared, “SEL helped me realize that I needed to

improve my social-emotional skills, too. So I told my students that becoming socially-emotionally intelligent is a lifelong goal and that perhaps we could work on these skills together—help keep each other in check. And they really do call me out sometimes. If I’m getting a little frustrated, they’ll say, ‘Ms. Ruud, you don’t get to talk to us like that because that’s not nice.’ And I tell them, ‘You’re right. That’s not fair of me.’ So we work on how we talk to each other and our general empathy towards others” (Zakrzewski, 2014, para. 9).

SEL Leadership Team Program Manager for OUSD and author of *Teach, Breathe, Learn: Mindfulness in and out of the Classroom*, Meena Srinivasan, shares how SEL renewed her love of teaching:

Before I started working with SEL, sometimes I got so stressed that I lost contact with my original intention for becoming a teacher. SEL has rekindled that light inside of me. It’s the light of why I became an educator in the first place—to help students connect with their dreams and aspirations and become better people who contribute to the world in a positive way. That’s the power of the SEL lens; it fosters purpose and meaning and deep connection. (Zakrzewski, 2014, para. 15)

As evidenced in the words of the teachers above, teaching SEL has helped promote teacher well-being (Zakrzewski, 2014). Imagine the implications this could have in our educational institutions, teachers and students working together toward social and emotional wellness. In order for this to occur, we will need more than just mandates from state and local policy. We need genuine commitment at the district level to promote, model, and support SEL. OUSD, serves as a prime example of embracing SEL. “OUSD has realized that teachers who don’t take care of themselves by developing their own social-emotional skills will have a hard time helping students to do so” (Zakrzewski, 2014, para. 11). For that reason, they have

appointed an Ambassador for SEL, Associate Superintendent Brigitte Marshall, who takes her role as “a leader in promoting teacher self-care throughout the district,” very seriously.

(Zakrzewski, 2014, para. 11). Marshall explains the following:

I’ve been given permission by the district to prioritize my own well-being and my understanding of being in relationship with people. The direction given by the district is that these things matter and will actually make you more effective in doing what you care about. But we constantly need reminders when the work becomes urgent to take care of ourselves—so that we come to work ready to do good work as opposed to fatigued and exhausted. To have the district institutionally name that this is important makes a huge difference, which is why I took my role as an ambassador of SEL throughout the district very, very seriously. If this is to permeate the district, then leaders have to take it seriously and lead in a certain way. Knowing this was the expectation of me, I could not be hypocritical and talk about work-life balance and improving interpersonal skills without focusing on improving these things for myself. (Zakrzewski, 2014, para. 12)

That said, we cannot expect teachers to teach what they do not know, and to really, and fully understand SEL, teachers themselves must experience it first-hand. Teacher self-care is securing one’s own oxygen mask first, before having the faculty to help others. “The relationship between teachers and students is at the heart of learning, and most teachers intuitively know this” (Zakrzewski, 2014, para. 17). As such, we have a lot to learn from school districts such as OUSD in that SEL must be embedded in the culture of the district. We cannot just purchase a program, hand the materials out to teachers, and expect to get the results that researchers boast about. Instead, if we really want to see impact and positive results, districts must prioritize SEL for all stakeholder groups; students, staff, and greater community.

## Section Five: Policy Implementation Plan

In SY 2016-2017, D1234 officially began the journey of district-wide implementation of SEL. In October of 2016, as a part of my doctoral program coursework, I worked together with the Executive Director of Student Services, and our consultant from the Charmm'd Foundation, to create an SEL Audit for D1234. The three of us collaborated on a 13 question Google Form survey that would be given to all staff.

The SEL Audit exposed a snapshot of where the district was “as is” (Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing, Howell & Rasmussen, 2006) in terms of teaching and learning practices in SEL. This audit provided exactly what D1234 needed, a wake up call. Prior to the survey, administrators would quite confidently speak about how D1234 staff was knowledgeable in the SEL standards, and incorporated SEL in their daily teaching practice. This survey painted a very different picture. The survey was taken by 142/159 staff members and the results of this survey were shocking:

- 63.4% of staff reported “not at all knowledgeable” or “slightly knowledgeable” of the SEL state standards
- 55% of staff reported “not at all confident” or “slightly confident” in their ability to teach the SEL standards
- 67.7% of staff reported that they had not received SEL PD within the past 3 years
- When asked, “How often did you refer to & integrate the SEL Standards into lesson planning during SY 2016-2017?” 72.5% of staff reported “not at all” or “trimesterly”
- When asked, “How often did you teach a lesson that addressed bullying awareness, prevention & intervention in SY 2015-2016?” 78.1% reported “not at all” or “trimesterly”

- 82.4% of staff believe that there is an “extreme or very important” need for *students* to develop SEL awareness and competencies.
- 73.2 feel that there is an extreme or very important need for *staff* to develop a greater understanding of SEL standards and competencies. (Correa, 2016)

By publishing the results of the SEL Audit, the need for action was clear. The cat was out of the bag, D1234 was clearly not in compliance with the Illinois State SEL Standards, nor were they compliant with their very own School Board Policy 6:65. It is unclear whether the catalyst was the newly hired Assistant Superintendent, Rachel Jones (pseudonym), or the newly released data from the SEL Audit, or maybe the combination of the two. It was obvious that this news was unsettling, and thus brought about much speculation in terms of how to proceed. With Rachel Jones at the helm, the SEL Administrative Team was formed. The team consisted of Rachel, Ivette Winter (pseudonym), Executive Director of Student Services, Laura Mott (pseudonym), Consultant from the Charmm’d Foundation who also happens to be my assigned professional coach in my role as EW Coordinator as well as a dear friend, middle school social worker, Jennifer Part (pseudonym), and myself, the Emotional Wellness Coordinator.

What became apparent rather quickly was that D1234 really won the lottery with hiring Rachel Jones. She is, in no uncertain terms, a top shelf administrator. She is not only knowledgeable, organized, and goal oriented, she also has strong interpersonal skills, an uncanny ability to delegate leadership roles, and is a good listener. Rachel brought with her an array of talents and competencies including the successful implementation of SEL in her previous district. Right from the start, Rachel set her sights on doing the same in D1234. As you can imagine, this was music to my ears.

Amidst the hectic schedule and demands that were eminent in her first year as Assistant Superintendent, Rachel prioritized meeting with Ivette, Laura, and I to learn more about EW and SEL in D1234. We met at great lengths to discuss the history of SEL in D1234, the Emotional Wellness Program in D1234, and how the two were related. Rachel listened very attentively to all we had to say. Eventually, we were able to collaborate in our shared hopes of bringing district-wide SEL programming to D1234.

In November of 2016, we, the Administrative SEL Team, made a visit to CASEL headquarters located in downtown Chicago. We met with Melissa Schlinger, Vice President of Programs and Practice, Karen VanAusdal, Director of Practice, and Ruth Cross, Senior SEL Consultant and Trainer for CASEL. Our conversation was fruitful and substantive as the CASEL staff asked key questions which brought to light our “as is” (Wagner et al., 2006) challenges as well as our “to be” (Wagner et al., 2006) opportunities for growth. Our biggest take away from the day was that our tanks were fueled with ideas, motivation, and inspiration for implementing SEL district-wide. On the train ride back to the River Woods, we began planning for district-wide SEL PD which I would present to the elementary schools during District PD time on November 28, 2016, and to the middle school staff during an Institute Day on January 13, 2017

Using district CII time and institute days to deliver SEL PD sent a clear message to D1234 staff that SEL was a priority. Our first major step in the effort to get the initial conversation started was to educate the staff on SEL and the Illinois State Learning Standards. This presentation, outlined the history of SEL, communicated a clear definition of SEL, shed light upon the current SEL legislation in the state of Illinois and D1234, and publicized the news

that D1234 was planning to implement SEL programming and practice district-wide. Following the presentation, a Google Doc was sent out asking for volunteers to join the D1234 SEL Task Force. Over 30 responses came in from staff who expressed interest in helping D1234 implement SEL district-wide. The SEL Task Force turned out to be a perfect cross section of the district in that the group had representation from all grade levels, subject areas, administrators, and specials such as a social workers, orchestra teacher, and speech pathologist.

The SEL Task Force work began on January 30, 2017. The agenda consisted of a recap of the SEL Audit results, a reminder that teaching SEL is the law in Illinois, a review of our work to date, and finally, developing SEL targets for D1234. Our work to date consisted of a conversation acknowledging what we currently have going on in the district related to SEL. Previous SEL curriculum, materials, and activities included our Charmm'd Foundation engagement, the Emotional Wellness Committees, Domain 2 of Danielson's Teaching Evaluation Tool which addresses the classroom environment, and our work to date with Randy Sprick's Foundations Framework. This conversation proved to our group that D1234 was not starting from scratch. D1234 already has existing framework that will help support district-wide implementation of SEL.

The afternoon portion of the workshop agenda was dedicated to unpacking the SEL standards, developing SEL targets for D1234, and powering the standards. Unpacking the SEL standards is a process that encourages small groups to work collaboratively to attain a definition and accord regarding specific learning targets incorporated within the standards (Bailey, Jakicic, & Dufour, 2011). In this unpacking process, groups work to dissect a standard and reveal smaller learning targets within that standard. The smaller learning targets aid in the alignment and the design of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The two questions that groups were instructed

to have in mind while unpacking the standards were, what does the standard mean? And what would it look like if a student could do this?

Having the SEL Task Force roll up their sleeves and really get familiar with the state SEL standards proved to be inextricably linked to learning the SEL standards. The unpacking process can consist of six steps. First step in the process involves identification of student learning to be assessed. The second step is to unpack the learning standard. Next, groups work together to power the learning targets. After that, “I can” statements can be crafted based upon the learning targets. Then, scaling work can begin, meaning assignment of a proficiency using a Likert scale or similar. Finally, groups work together to create a list of possible observable behaviors.

Although this work was tedious, it was extraordinarily helpful in our SEL Task Force gaining proficiency with the SEL standards. Following the SEL Task Force Workshop, staff members were asked to present their experiences and the work that was accomplished at their respective buildings during a staff meeting. The purpose of this presentation was primarily to gather feedback from staff that would be shared out with the Task Force when we reconvened in March. I worked with building level teams to build presentations that would be used to present consistent information at building staff meetings district-wide.

Continuing with momentum, the next SEL Task Force Workshop was a ½ Day Workshop held March 24, 2017, during a district Institute Day. The agenda for this time together consisted of reflecting on the SEL standards share out with staff at building level meetings, learning about proficiency scales, and building proficiency scales for the SEL standards. The SEL Administrative Team was pleased with the feedback shared by the Task Force members. The Task Force reported that staff is open minded about having more consistency around SEL in all the schools and that we are addressing the standards. Some excellent questions surfaced in

this feedback including, who will be held accountable to deliver these skills, how, and when? How will we measure SEL? Will we be directly teaching SEL, or will we be embedding the skills in existing curriculum?

It is important to note that along with the positive feedback we received regarding district-wide implementation of SEL, there was cynicism regarding past programming such as Bully Proofing Your School, Capturing Kids Hearts, Advisory, and Second Step. Staff wanted to know who would be responsible for delivering this curriculum? How would it be delivered? And when, in an already packed schedule, would they be expected to teach SEL? Staff also expressed their feeling that the district has rushed into adoption of SEL programming in the past, that has since fallen by the wayside. What would be different about this implementation process? On the bright side, there was total agreement among staff that there is a great need for teaching students SEL skills and competencies.

On March 8, 2017, D1234 Assistant Superintendent, Rachel Jones, and I made a site visit to a neighboring school, Maple Orchard in order to learn more about their SEL program as well as observe SEL lessons being taught. In the past, Maple Orchard had struggled to incorporate consistent SEL programming in their educational program. In order to try something different, they hired a full time SEL teacher. This teacher travels from classroom to classroom teaching K-8 SEL lessons each week. This manner of delivery is intriguing because it ensures consistency and buy in as the same teacher, who is extremely passionate about SEL, is teaching all students all SEL lessons. The downfall of this manner of delivery is that the rest of the staff is not benefitting from the teaching and learning of SEL. In order to have consistent language surrounding SEL skills and competencies, it is helpful for all staff in the building to speak the same language, meaning use the same vocabulary and strategies. This site visit was very

insightful as we are still trying to determine the best way to deliver the SEL curriculum and programming.

During the first week back to school, August 25, 2017 the SEL Administrative Team met to discuss an SEL implementation planning timeline. Our SEL Administrative Team had grown to include two more members, the newly named Teaching and Learning Coordinator, Riley Fitzgerald, and elementary school principal, Anna Stowe. Riley and Rachel had great chemistry in their leadership style in that they were both strong-minded, forward thinking, get it done kind of leaders. At this meeting, it was decided that we would set out and research current universal Tier 1, SEL curriculum and programming options. From this research, each member of the team would choose their top three choices for SEL resources to present to one another at our next meeting. A Team Drive was also created on Google to house all of our documents.

Many schools seek to promote a positive school climate by implementing a universal, Tier 1 SEL approach. Through universal Tier 1 programming, all members of the target population are exposed to the intervention regardless of need. With universal prevention approaches, a curriculum, or set of lessons and activities serve to benefit all individuals within that setting (e.g., school) (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). There are a plethora of research-based universal Tier 1 SEL programs, which are used as preventive measures. Such programs typically consist of SEL lessons taught by classroom teachers and/or counselors who model expected behaviors, strategies, social and emotional wellness. Some Tier 1 approaches involve teachers holding classroom meetings with students to discuss emotionally relevant issues related to social and emotional wellbeing, bullying or other relevant matters (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016).

The next meeting for the SEL Administrative Team was on September 13, 2017. This meeting consisted of the SEL resource share out. Each member of the team presented their top three SEL resources. For program vetting purposes, the most commonly used resources were CASEL's SEL Program Guide, and Harvard Graduate School of Education's, Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out, Looking Inside and Across 25 Leading SEL Programs: A Practical Resource for Schools and OST Providers (Elementary School Focus). Both of the aforementioned guides provide in depth information regarding SEL program curricular content and features. The guides allow practitioners to compare and contrast curriculum, methods, and features across top rated, research based SEL programs. In addition, these guides provide detailed information of how programs can be modified from in-school to out-of-school-time settings, such as at home lessons, and after school programs.

As a result of this meeting, the SEL Administrative Team voted to further investigate the following SEL programs; Second Step, Lion's Quest, and RULER, with Facing History and Mindup being investigated as supplementary curriculum. On November 29, 2017 the SEL Task Force will meet again for a full day workshop where these programs will be further examined. On the agenda for this workshop is finishing up with SEL targets and scaling. When all scaling is finished, there will be a gallery walk to check for consistency and alignment of SEL standards and scales across the grade level bands. Following the gallery walk, there will be a feedback session to help reflect upon work to date and inform future work. In the afternoon, representatives from each of the above listed SEL programs will present their program or approach to the SEL Task Force. After the presentations, there will be feedback and discussion regarding the different SEL resource presentations. Attendees will be asked to fill out an exit slip which will ask members to comment on the strengths and challenges of each resource, and

which, if any, resource they feel should be piloted. Responses will be analyzed and the SEL Administrative Team will meet to determine appropriate next steps.

In January, 2018 D1234 will be piloting select resources. Members of the SEL Task Force will be encouraged to join a pilot cohort to assist the district with the selection process. The SEL Administrative Team will arrange two to three meetings with pilot cohort teachers to gain further insight, feedback, and overall satisfaction with SEL resources. Based on this feedback, a recommendation will be presented to the Board of Education before March, 2018.

On March 1, 2018 a formal adoption of the selected SEL resource will be formally presented via Board of Education presentation. Upon passage of the adoption, D1234 will be using March through June of 2018 to provide training to all district staff on SEL resource. In my opinion, providing training to staff is quite possibly the most important step of all. I have spoken at great length of Vicki Zakrzewski's work highlighting the essential component of implementing SEL, which is staff training and development in their own well-being and self-care. I will continue to advocate that the great majority of PD time is allocated to staff development and training by teaching staff the meaning and significance of well-being, self-care, and the five competencies of SEL. Afterall, "the relationship between teachers and students is at the heart of learning, and most teachers intuitively know this" (Zakrzewski, 2014, para. 17). SEL promotes these very relationships, and in doing so, promotes learning.

The timeline that has been set is very rigid and very aggressive. If all of this goes as planned, by the 2018-2019 School Year, D1234 will have formally implemented an SEL resource across the district. I would like to interject that as much as this would prove to be a major feat in advocacy of policy compliance at both the state and local level, I believe that it may be too aggressive. I would like to proceed thoughtfully and with great attention focused on staff

training and PD in SEL. To be honest, I will advocate for a year of piloting combined with intensive staff development in SEL before rolling the program out district-wide. If D1234 is going to be successful, those on the front line, the teachers, need to be models of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision makers. If D1234 is not going to make this investment in social capital, then I am afraid we are setting ourselves up for failure.

As I have explained in the previous paragraphs, the SEL Administrative Team has served as a vehicle for my SEL policy advocacy mission to lead the effort for district-wide implementation of SEL in D1234. From the onset, the SEL Administrative Team established short and long term goals. Our short term goals were to adopt a K-8 scope and sequence of SEL programming complete with standards and scaled learning targets. Additionally, we set out to select an SEL resource, and pilot that resource November through February of 2018. We have budgeted \$15,000 for the initial expenses of this program adoption and implementation process. Based on the pilot, we will determine how to fully implement the program for the 2018-2019 school year, including one of the most important aspects of SEL program adoption, mapping out teacher trainings.

Our long-term goals are, first and foremost, district-wide implementation of SEL programming, and staff development in SEL. I hope to continue to work collaboratively with the high school to ensure a K-12 progression of SEL and well-being for both students and staff. As part of the standards based SEL curriculum, the district aims to establish a multitiered system of SEL learning and assessment to provide a systematic way of measuring growth in SEL skills and competencies, as well as a way to report out the data. Included in this measure, we hope to develop a screening tool to identify students needing more support so that appropriate

interventions can be provided. As good as this sounds in theory, coming up with a reliable SEL measure, or assessment, has even the most committed proponents of SEL at odds with one another.

### **Section Six: Policy Assessment Plan**

As we seek to monitor progress with district-wide implementation of SEL, one must keep in mind that SEL standards have been in place for 13 years in Illinois, yet there has been anything but consist teaching, learning, and assessing SEL skills and competencies. As Carla Tantillo Phillibert, founder of Mindful Practices, one of Chicago’s leading school SEL organizations, explained in a recent conference, Illinois adopted SEL standards in 2004, yet has since failed to support this adoption by way of teacher trainings (Phillibert, 2017). It goes back to the questions from the D1234 SEL Audit; Rate your level of knowledge of the SEL standards? Rate your level of confidence in teaching the SEL standards? How often have you received PD in SEL over the past 3 years? 63.4% of staff members reported that they were not at all, or slightly knowledgeable of the SEL standards. As such, it is not surprising that 55% of staff claimed to have slight to no confidence at all in teaching the SEL standards. To understand this lack of knowledge and confidence, we can look to the fact that 67.6% of staff have not received any SEL PD in the past three years (Correa, 2017). When asked about accountability and expectations of teaching SEL, Tim Shriver, cofounder of CASEL, stated, “There is a groundswell of recognition that the academic, social, and emotional development of children are intertwined in all experiences of learning, I think that’s booming... Someone might say, ‘Why aren’t you holding states accountable for teaching it?’ The answer to that is we are not ready for it yet” (Blad, 2017).

Progress monitoring will take place primarily within the SEL Administrative Team. As of now, there has not been a proposal to the Board of Education to hire an SEL Coordinator. If the proposal is made and the position is appointed, then the SEL Coordinator will be the point person for program monitoring, assessing, data collection, analysis, and reporting. The SEL Administrative Team has monthly meetings scheduled to keep a finger on the pulse of the implementation process. That said, we are looking for SEL programs that have a measurement or assessment tool incorporated in the program design. Additionally, the long term data of the CSCI will also be taken into consideration to gauge program impact.

When speaking of SEL assessment, I feel obligated to share the disaccord among proponents of SEL in the educational community. The question that looms is how can we objectively, and reliably measure, or assess students' SEL skills and competencies. The two most common methods of assessment are teacher assessing student, and student self-assessing, both of which are prone to bias, subjective in nature, and lack reliability.

With the passage of ESSA, there was speculation among the educational community as to whether or not schools would be held accountable to measure and report growth in SEL. That said, there has been motivation surrounding the creation of an instrument to capitalize on the potential market of SEL measurement instruments. Examples of SEL assessment instruments are the Devereux student strengths assessment (DSSA), social-emotional assets and resilience scale (SEARS), Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scales, the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS), and the Preschool BERS (PreBERS).

The DSSA comes with a four-item accompanying screener, the DESSA-Mini. These behavior rating scales are for elementary school-age children (K-8), and include a parent and/or teacher component. The DESSA measures child strengths that relate directly to SEL skills and

competencies. There are 72 items across eight scales including; optimistic thinking, self-management, goal-directed behavior, self-awareness, social awareness, personal responsibility, decision making and relationship skills (Denan, 2016).

SEARS is designed for K-12 and includes a screener. SEARS has a teacher component referred to as the SEARS-T, a parent component referred to as the SEARS-P, a child component referred to as the SEARS-C, and an adolescent component, the SEARS-A. All versions of the SEARS examine SEL from a conceptual framework focusing on responsibility, social competence, empathy, and self-regulation. The SEARS is a comprehensive measure that can be informative when planning for interventions, and ongoing student progress monitoring (Denan, 2016).

The Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scales is a set of rating scales patterned to assess a child's social behavior. This measure can be instrumental in supporting implementation of behavior interventions. This measure is an updated version of its predecessor, the Social Skills Rating Scales. Some of the program updates include; updated norms, four additional subscales for a broader conceptualization of social-emotional development, greater overlap across forms, validity scales, improved psychometric properties, Spanish language version of forms, and direct links to recommended interventions (Denan, 2016).

Lastly, are the BERS, and the Preschool BERS (PreBERS). These measures are strength-based SEL instruments. Both instruments show vigorous, factor structures, are replicable, as well as valid and reliable. Additionally, a Spanish version of the BERS and Pre BERS is available for parent completion (Denan, 2016).

Despite the fact that these measures exist, the true validity of assessing SEL skills continues to be a topic of contention. As there seems to be a race to assess SEL skills and

competencies, even the biggest proponents of SEL warn against such measurement. “I do not think we should be doing this; it is a bad idea,” said Angela Duckworth, MacArthur fellow and author of popular SEL book, “Grit” (Zernike, 2016). Duckworth attended a White House meeting on measuring social-emotional skills, after which, she and a colleague wrote a paper warning that there were no reliable ways to do so. “Our working title was all measures suck, and they all suck in their own way,” said Duckworth (Zernike, 2016). “There are so many ways to do this wrong,” said Camille A. Farrington, researcher at the University of Chicago, who works with a network of schools across the country on the measurement of SEL skills (Zernike, 2016). Teaching SEL can be seen as a way to move away from the narrow focus on standardized test scores, and instead, take into consideration the whole child. Critics feel that it is contradictory, then, to test for SEL skills (Zernike, 2016).

As of now, the SEL standards have been scaled and these scales can technically be used in assessment. The jury is still out whether we will be asking teachers to include this assessment in their grading reports. In a broad sense, D1234 is planning to gage whether SEL programming is working by continuing to use the CSCI as an indirect measure. The high school also uses the CSCI, so we will have long-term comparative data to analyze. Additionally, there is talk that we will also be looking to factors such as high school graduation rate, disciplinary reports, attendance records, and staff and student focus groups to inform changes that need to be made.

## Section Seven: Summary Impact Statement

Advocacy for compliance of Illinois SEL Standards, and D1234 Board Policy 6:65, in my opinion, is a call for social justice in our schools. As pioneers in state-wide adoption of SEL standards, Illinois has the both the opportunity and the obligation to see this initiative through. In order to do so, there must be accountability measures in place to ensure that all children in the state of Illinois are being empowered by SEL programming. Research continues to reveal that SEL programs, when implemented with fidelity, can positively impact school climate and promote a host of academic, social, and emotional benefits for students. We cannot dismiss Durlak, Weissberg et al.'s meta-analysis of 213 rigorous studies of SEL in schools which revealed that students receiving quality SEL instruction demonstrated:

- **better academic performance:** achievement scores an average of 11 percentile points higher than students who did not receive SEL instruction;
- **improved attitudes and behaviors:** greater motivation to learn, deeper commitment to school, increased time devoted to schoolwork, and better classroom behavior;
- **fewer negative behaviors:** decreased disruptive class behavior, noncompliance, aggression, delinquent acts, and disciplinary referrals; and
- **reduced emotional distress:** fewer reports of student depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal. (<http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/outcomes/>)

Student and staff values are at the center of Board Policy 6:65 and the Illinois SEL Standards. Deeply rooted in the vision of Board Policy 6:65 is the need to address the SEL concerns of all stakeholders; students, staff, and the community at large. Specifically, the objectives of this policy are to; enhance students' school readiness, academic success, and use of good citizenship skills, foster a safe, supportive learning environment where students feel

respected and valued, teach social and emotional skills to all students, partner with families and the community to promote students' social and emotional development, and to prevent or minimize mental health problems in students (Board of Education Policy 6:65). Who can argue with these objectives? Is not this what we want for our students, our children, our staff, our families, and our communities? As stewards of free and public education, I contend that it is our obligation to the children of this country, to empower each child with the SEL skills and competencies that will have the most potential to impact their short and long-term wellbeing.

Now more than ever, it is imperative that we proactively teach social and emotional wellness skills and competencies to our children. In an article titled, *The Scary Truth About What's Hurting Our Kids*, Becky Mansfield explores the unique predicament of the reality that our children are finding in their day to day lives. In her article, Mansfield shares the work of Dr. Jean Twenge, author of *iGen*. Dr. Twenge began researching generational differences 25 years ago. What startled Dr. Twenge most in her research was what started happening in 2011 -2012 and continued into present day. Coincidentally, 2011-2012 was the year that the percentage of students with iPhones rose above 50% of the population (Mansfield, 2017). Here is what Dr. Twenge reported:

- This was the year that more kids started to say that they felt “sad, hopeless, useless... that they couldn't do anything right (depression).”
- They felt left-out and lonely.
- There is a 50% increase in a clinical level depression between 2011-2015.
- A substantial increase in suicide rate. (Mansfield, 2017)

Dr. Twenge describes these modern times as the worst mental health crisis we have seen in decades (Mansfield, 2017). Mansfield's article goes on to cite the work of Victoria Prooday,

Occupational Therapist & writer at YourOT.com. “There is a silent tragedy developing right now, in our homes, and it concerns our most precious jewels – our children... Researchers have been releasing alarming statistics on a sharp and steady increase in kids’ mental illness, which is now reaching epidemic proportions” (Mansfield, 2017):

- 1 in 5 children has mental health problems
- 43% increase in ADHD
- 37% increase in teen depression
- 200% increase in suicide rate in kids 10-14 years old (Mansfield, 2017)

Prooday goes on to say that she believes “today’s children are being deprived of the fundamentals of a healthy childhood,” such as, “emotionally available parents, clearly defined limits and guidance, responsibilities, balanced nutrition and adequate sleep, movement and outdoors, creative play, social interaction, opportunities for unstructured times and boredom” (Mansfield, 2017). Prooday contends that instead of these fundamentally sound structures of a healthy childhood, children are dealing with, “digitally distracted parents, indulgent parents who let kids “Rule the world,” a sense of entitlement rather than responsibility, inadequate sleep and unbalanced nutrition, sedentary indoor lifestyle, endless stimulation, technological babysitters, instant gratification, and absence of dull moments” (Mansfield, 2017). As a parent and an educator, I could not agree more with Prooday’s convictions, which only fuels my fire to advocate for SEL in our schools.

With our given circumstances in an uber-connected world, our children seem to be feeling less connected. If we do not respond to the needs of our nation’s youth, we are doing them a terrible disservice. How are schools supporting our students socially, emotionally, and academically in these challenging circumstances? According to Susanna Schrobsdorff, columnist

and Chief Strategic Partnerships Editor for TIME, “Despite the rise in teen depression, the study, which analyzed data from the National Surveys on Drug Use and Health, reported that there wasn’t a corresponding increase in mental health treatment for adolescents and young adults. Researchers said this is an indication that there is a growing number of young people who are under-treated or not treated at all for their symptoms.” (Schrobsdorff, 2017).

We as educators, and stewards of free and public education, must advocate for doing what is best for our students. Evidenced by research, and esteemed by recent federal legislation, the importance of teaching the whole child, and implementing SEL in our schools is essential for the wellbeing of our students, our staff, our schools, our communities, and our world. In this policy advocacy piece, I have advocated for adherence to existing local school board policy which calls for the incorporation of SEL in D1234’s educational program, and compliance in teaching Illinois state SEL standards. I have argued that existing SEL policy has been overshadowed by the current trend in testing and accountability. I have suggested that Tier 1 SEL programming is in the best interest of our schools, our communities, and our world. As we see mental health concerns on the rise, it is critical to teach our youth to acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set, and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2017). It is imperative that we empower our students with SEL skills and competencies that will help them to lead a meaningful life rooted in social and emotional wellbeing.

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## Appendix A

# Illinois Social Emotional Learning Standards



**Goal 1: Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.**

- A. Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.
- B. Recognize personal qualities and external supports.
- C. Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals.

**Goal 2: Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships**

- A. Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.
- B. Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.
- C. Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.
- D. Demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.

**Goal 3: Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.**

- A. Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.
- B. Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.
- C. Contribute to the well-being of one's school and community.