

BOARD BRIEF

Date: May 10, 2024

BOARD INFORMATION: X

MEETING PREPARATION: _____

FROM: Jennifer Whitson, Ed.D., Evaluation and Assessment Analyst
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THROUGH: Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Michelle Rief, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Evaluation Update

ACPS 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL:

Goal 1: Systemic Alignment
Goal 3: Student Accessibility and Support

FY 2024 BUDGET PRIORITY:

Restorative Practices Supports
Increase Support for Social and Emotional Learning

SY 2023-2024 FOCUS AREA:

Student Supports
CASEL Social Emotional Learning Competencies
Student Connection and Attendance
Staff Supports
Continue Culture Building

SUMMARY:

On December 1, 2023, ACPS launched the formative evaluation of the division’s Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs in partnership with the American Institutes of Research (AIR). Since launching, the research team has led innovative approaches in advancing stakeholder voice throughout the program evaluation process beyond just collecting feedback on specific programming. Activities to date include: met with stakeholders to co-design the evaluation plan including school site visits to a sample of schools; analyzed key documents and data sources for the division; and visited a sample of six schools to gain stakeholder insights into how SEL Tier 1 programs are being implemented and being experienced by students and staff. In June, the stakeholder group will reconvene to engage in a meaning-making session where data and themes emerging from the data collection efforts will be discussed and reviewed to help guide the research team’s findings.

BACKGROUND:

ACPS’ Equity for All: 2025 strategic plan states that, “ACPS will ensure students have equitable access to and engagement with programs and supports that reduce barriers to learning.” Division and school leaders, with input from teachers and students, developed a logic model in the spring of 2023. This process identified differences in supportive relationships (both students and staff) that lead to disproportionate outcomes including attendance, behaviors, and student achievement as part of the needs that SEL programs are designed to address. Further, students

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and staff experience stress and trauma in school and life that may require specific support in order to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to engage effectively in teaching and learning.

MTSS Tier 1 programs that are proactive in delivering SEL content for all students were prioritized for this formative evaluation. The primary activities outlined in the logic model include division SE(A)L lessons, the RULER curriculum, Restorative Practices, Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS), and delivery of professional learning in classroom management strategies and SEL supports.

The purpose of the evaluation is to formatively assess implementation of SEL programs within the division to drive improvement efforts. The following key research questions serve as a guide for the evaluation:

1. What are some of the more common strategies ACPS staff are using to build relationships and what does that look like and sound like?
2. What are facilitators and constraints to implementing SEL across the division?
3. To what extent do adults in the division have the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to be able to deliver and model SEL programs?
4. To what extent is there evidence of organizational alignment and integration (e.g. MTSS) to support student and adult SEL?

The division has taken a different approach to engaging students in this evaluation beyond the typical informant role typical of focus groups and empathy interviews. More than 15 students have participated in planning activities including recruitment strategies, themes to probe, focus group protocols, and walkthrough activities. One student who had a strong interest in the topic and evaluation methods took a leadership role in facilitating the student focus groups and refining the protocol which helped improve the relevance and understanding for students.

The research team is in the process of analyzing data and identifying themes across data sources. These will be presented to a group of stakeholders representing students, teachers, Student Support Team (SST) staff, and school and division leaders June 10 and 11, 2024.

RECOMMENDATION: The Superintendent recommends that the School Board review the information within this memo and attachments pertaining to the evaluation of SEL.

IMPACT:

The process initiated to date has been a collaborative effort involving students, school as well as department staff towards actionable recommendations aligned to the specific needs of students and staff within ACPS.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. SEL Evaluation Progress Update

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