



Social-Emotional Learning in Action

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# A Case Study of Andover Public Schools, Andover, Massachusetts

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Introductory Summary



AASA, The School Superintendents Association,  
and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative



## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In partnership with the Chan Zuckerberg Institute (CZI), AASA is committed to working with educational leaders to integrate Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies within their respective learning organizations. This third in a series of case studies of Andover Public Schools (MA) is designed as a brief introductory overview of what Andover has achieved in its implementation of SEL. It can be a useful resource for introducing to staff how a successful school district began, scaled up, and sustained its comprehensive SEL implementation process.



## AN INTRODUCTION TO ANDOVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS, MASSACHUSETTS

Andover Public Schools is recognized as one of the highest performing districts in the state of Massachusetts. It currently has a total enrollment of approximately 6,000 students. The district has one preschool, five K-5 elementary schools, three 6-8 middle schools, and one senior high school.

- 95% of Andover graduates are college-bound. Over the last 10 years, more than 33% of Andover High School students were admitted to the most selective colleges and universities in the country; 75% were admitted to very selective institutions.
- The district averages a student-staff ratio that is one of the lowest in the state when compared to similar districts.
- During the past 10 years, nearly 90% of Andover High School graduates were still enrolled in higher education institutions within 16 months of graduation.
- Graduation rates average 96%, one of the highest in the state of Massachusetts.



# ANDOVER

## THEORY OF ACTION

Viewed in their entirety, our goals, mission, and vision provide the framework of what we want to achieve and how we plan to get there. We call this framework our Theory of Action:

### WHEN we collaborate to...

- Create safe, caring, and culturally responsive classrooms and schools, and partner with families and the community to support students' academic growth and their social, physical and emotional well-being.
- Ensure that every student engaged in a rigorous curriculum that is implemented consistently within and across schools.
- Provide inclusive instruction that engages every student in authentic learning experiences, demonstrates the power of effective effort and fosters inquiry, creativity and positive risk taking.
- Monitor student progress diagnostically and plan instruction after thorough and thoughtful data analysis to ensure every student reaches proficiency.

### THEN all students will...

- Demonstrate academic growth in foundational content and skills;
- Communicate effectively, think critically, problem solve creatively, work collaboratively, and evaluate objectively;
- Be self-directed and persevering agents of their own learning; and
- Demonstrate cultural awareness, an appreciation of self, empathy toward others, a sense of responsibility, and commitment to civic engagement.





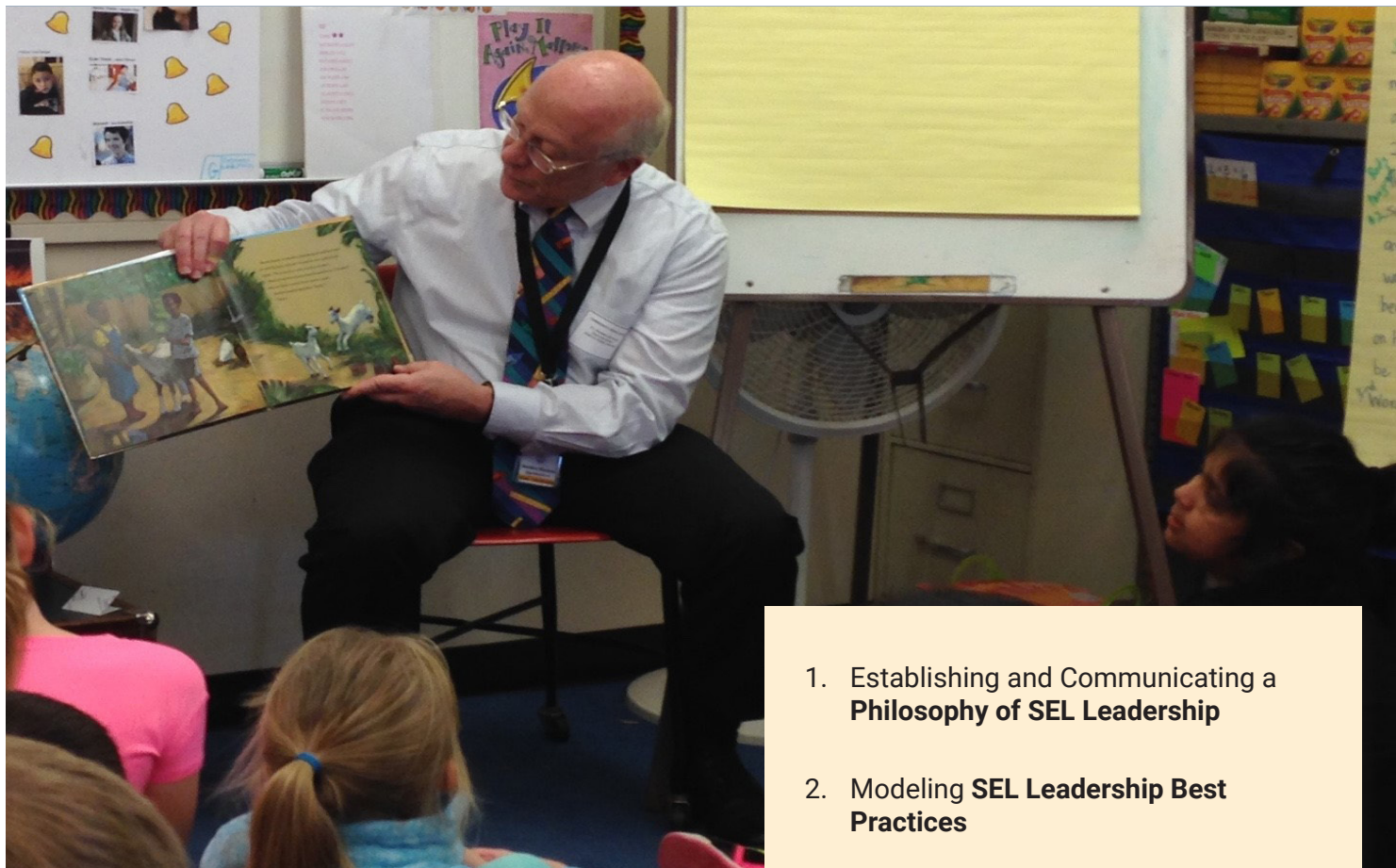
# A Synthesis of Key SEL Programs and Practices in Andover Public Schools

- 1 Sustained professional development for faculty and administrators, including ongoing workshops involving SEL and Responsive Classroom, including year long training and SEL endorsement program in SEL with William James College. Year-long training and SEL endorsement program in partnership with William James College.
- 2 Expanded use of morning and closing meetings at the elementary level
- 3 Direct instruction of social skills at the elementary level, including use of programs such as Open Circle and Second Step
- 4 Implementation of the Where Everyone Belongs (WEB) program in all middle schools.
- 5 Design and implementation of the One Community, One Nation elementary social studies curriculum to focus on diversity and equity
- 6 Emphasis upon diversity and cultural proficiency at the secondary level through professional development facilitated by Facing History and Ourselves
- 7 Administration of the Panorama Survey to chart progress in fostering a positive school climate and to examine students' social awareness, growth mindset, and grit
- 8 Sustained use of a high school advisory program to personalize the learning environment.
- 9 Since September 2017, use of a personalization period called "H Block" at the high school level
- 10 Use of community service and service learning
- 11 R.A.I.S.E.—Our Community Values: APS reinforces civic and character education.
- 12 Andover Healthy Relationships Coalition
- 13 Integration of mindfulness techniques and strategies
- 14 Integration of SEL into Andover's Multi-Tiered System of Support
- 15 Providing SEL resources for staff, and families in stress





# The Superintendent's Role in SEL Implementation



1. Establishing and Communicating a **Philosophy of SEL Leadership**
2. Modeling **SEL Leadership Best Practices**
3. Promoting **Distributed SEL Leadership**
4. Emphasizing and reinforcing the Goal of **Community Building**
5. Integrating SEL into **Grading and Hiring Practices**
6. Understanding the **Relationship Between Equity and SEL**
7. Aligning **SEL with the Digital World**
8. Reinforcing the Power of **Civic Responsibility and Engagement**



# Central Office Perspectives on Leadership for Social-Emotional Learning and Culturally Responsive Practice

## Key Principles and Assertions of Andover Public Schools Central Office SEL Leadership

According to Andover leadership, a sense of community and inclusivity is critical for successful SEL implementation. All students must be given support to experience being valued, influential contributors to a classroom as well as school group that is dedicated to the learning and well-being of all its members. Leaders identified five “practice components” reinforced in all Andover Public Schools:

1. Direct social skills instruction (with clear lesson-based objectives, teacher modeling, and ongoing coaching and mentoring of learners);
2. Integration of social skills into academic instruction (emphasizing the critical importance of social competencies in promoting student achievement);
3. The importance of sustaining positive and engaging school and classroom climate and culture (ensuring that every student feels part of a positive community of learning);
4. Providing students multiple practical experiences in the community (reinforcing real-world applications and authentic application to students’ lived experience); and
5. Reinforcing the critical importance of service learning and community service (beginning with elementary experiences and culminating in high school projects).



## Building Systems of Care

The success of the Andover SEL initiative is its integration of academic, social, psychological, and health programs and services—reinforcing the idea that an effective 21st century education must address the health, physical development, social-emotional, psychological, and civic education needs of every learner:

### FROM

- Fragmented service delivery in siloes
- Categorical programs/funding
- Limited services
- Reactive, crisis-oriented
- Focus on out-of-district or restrictive placements
- Anecdotal driven
- Centralized authority
- Creation of “dependency”
- Haphazard practices

### TO

- Coordinated service delivery
- Blended resources
- Comprehensive services and supports
- Focus on prevention
- Individualized services and supports in least restrictive, normalized environments
- Accountability driven
- Community-based ownership
- Creation of self-help
- Consistent, evidence-based practices



# SEL Leadership, Part III: School-Based Leadership for Social-Emotional Learning and Culturally Responsive Practice



## Key Principles of School-Based SEL Leadership

Andover Public Schools has four strategic goals: Advance student learning through (1) rigorous curriculum, (2) inclusive instruction, (3) progress monitoring, and (4) caring and culturally responsive classrooms. In addition, the social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum. According to Dr. Berman: “We must think about it in a coherent and cohesive way. We are examining our scope and sequence related to SEL—not just academics.”

Additionally, the district reinforces four core practices associated with leading SEL implementation:

- Direct social skill instruction (conflict resolution, collaboration, resolving differences, taking others’ perspectives);
- Integration into academic instruction;
- School and classroom climate and culture; and
- Practical experience in the community (service learning and community service).

A controlling principle of SEL implementation underlies leadership practices: Students need to apply and act on SEL skills in the real world. Andover takes a systemic approach, ensuring programs, resources, and approaches that address each of the core practices at each level (elementary, middle, high).

## Controlling Principles of SEL School-Based Leadership in Andover Public Schools

1. The Critical Relationship Between **SEL** and **Culturally Responsive Classrooms**
2. **Establishing and Sustaining Routines and Patterns** to Support SEL and Cultural Responsiveness
3. **Integrating SEL and CRP** into the Curriculum Design and Implementation Process
4. Ensuring That Schools Are **Trauma-Informed and Trauma-Skilled**
5. Building Consensus About Criteria for **Monitoring and Assessing** the Impact of SEL Implementation and Culturally Responsive Practices (CRP)
6. Anticipating and Addressing the **Inevitable Challenges** Associated with the Change Process

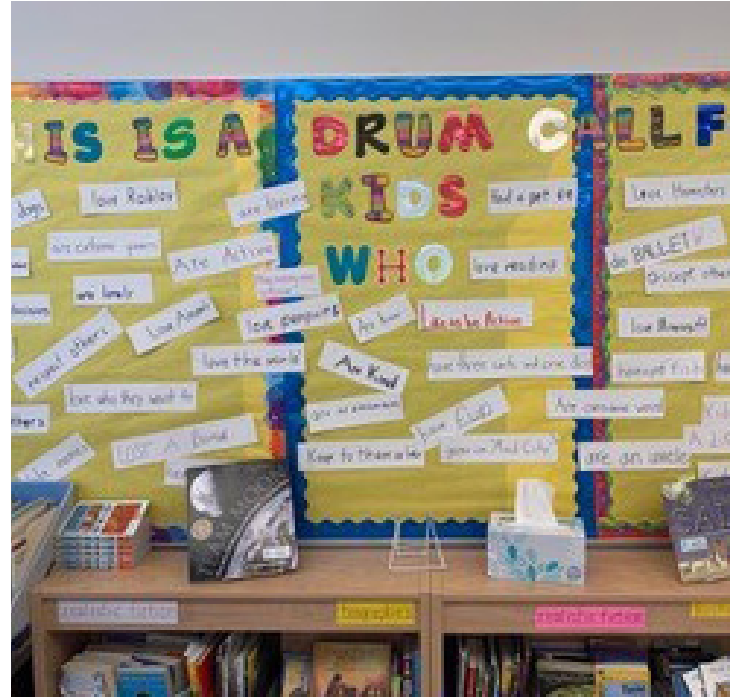


# The Classroom Perspective: The Impact of SEL on Teaching and Learning

## Teacher Observations About the Importance of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Culturally Responsive Practices (CRP)

Andover teachers were also unanimous in their assertion that the social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum: “We must be as conscious about structuring the social-emotional curriculum as we are about content-based curriculum.” To achieve this goal, the district has identified four core elements:

- Direct social skill instruction;
- Integration into academic instruction;
- School and classroom climate and culture; and
- Practical experience in the community as well as service learning.



## Observable Indicators of SEL and CRP in Andover Classrooms and Schools

Teachers interviewed for this case study were in agreement that certain universal strategies and practices should be observable when SEL is operational in a culturally responsive classroom, including:

1. SEL Integration
2. Clear SEL Objectives in Daily Lessons
3. Metacognition and Self-Reflection
4. Active and Experience-Based Learning
5. Curriculum Integration and Alignment
6. Classroom SEL Routines
7. Debriefing and Student Voice
8. Authenticity and Real-World Applications
9. SEL Progress Monitoring
10. Service Learning





# Massachusetts Statewide Efforts to Promote Social-Emotional Learning: Perspectives on Cross-Institutional SEL Partnerships



## Massachusetts Statewide Efforts to Promote Social-Emotional Learning

Superintendent Shelley Berman began this session by Massachusetts promotes educator development related to classroom and school support for social-emotional learning, health, and safety. The state has also undertaken a multi-year commitment to turning around the lowest performing districts and schools by enhancing equitable resource allocation and data use. Associate Commissioner Bennett identified multiple statewide SEL programs and initiatives, including:

1. A statewide motto for SEL: Integrate, Create, Engage
2. Commitment to strengthening SEL competencies in all initiatives and resource documents
3. Development of specific guidance and professional development opportunities to strengthen SEL competencies in students and adults
4. Engagement of mental health and other service providers in SEL-related statewide academies
5. Curriculum integration in which all revisions of curriculum frameworks incorporate SEL competencies, including the state's comprehensive health framework
6. Reinforcement of SEL as the underpinning of the state and districts' Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)
7. Creation of a statewide website and newsletter related to SEL
8. Development of piloting resources in early grades related to SEL—as well as intersection of SEL and equity
9. Emphasis on SEL via the Massachusetts Educational Development Center, Transforming Education, and school closure documents and guidelines, as well as integration of SEL into the state Mental Health Academy (networking)
10. Starting a School Mental Health initiative (beginning in Fall 2020)
11. Serving as a collaborating state with CASEL and other states—interacting with other state departments of education, reinforcing collaboration on SEL within and across states



### **Cross-Organizational Promotion and Strengthening of SEL Work in the State of Massachusetts**

Within the Andover School District, a major partner has been William James College, which offers a 15-credit SEL professional development program that uses a blended learning approach (i.e., four weekends in residence combined with online learning). Nadja Reilly, Associate Director of the Freedman Center for Child and Family Development, emphasized that Andover Public Schools has greatly increased SEL implementation by building consensus and putting into action the following lessons and controlling principles:

- Successful SEL implementation requires intentionality, prevention, and a systemic approach.
- In addition to emphasizing research-based principles from learning science, SEL must take into account the large body of research related to prevention and reduction of trauma.
- Educators need a learning mindset to approach and succeed in implementing SEL, including understanding and reinforcing strategies for building psychological safety and trust.
- Successful SEL leaders reinforce the value of culturally responsive practices, ensuring that all students feel supported, have one or more adults they can confide in and trust, and can see themselves in the curriculum they are studying.
- Progress monitoring and evaluation of SEL impact must be data-driven in its approach. The district must have clearly articulated SEL performance standards and determine the correlation between student growth and achievement based upon identified SEL strategies used in classrooms and schools.
- An SEL-compatible learning organization must reinforce professional discourse about SEL. It should be ongoing and intentional, ensuring that staff talk to one another and share successful strategies and resolve shared problems of practice.