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SPS Reopening Plan - SEL and Mental Health

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VI. SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

The Covid-19 health emergency has resulted in an unprecedented shift in our learning models and has the potential to have lasting and profound impact on young people's academic, social, and emotional lives as they enter back into established spaces for learning. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) will be critical to re-engaging and supporting students and adults, building strong relationships, and creating a foundation for academic learning. We see our role as co-creating equitable, adaptive, and supportive learning environments -- whether remote or in-person -- where all students and adults can feel safe and a sense of belonging, enhance their social and emotional competencies, and thrive.

To support this work, Somerville Public Schools formed a SEL Task Force, led by the Director of Student Services and composed of school counselors, representative of all grade bands, as well as representation from the Somerville

Department of Health and Human Services. In preparation for the upcoming school year, the team provided a series of recommendations to incorporate into daily instruction and school-wide practices. These recommendations were informed by [CASEL](#) and the DESE recommendations. The district-wide SEL Task Force will be complemented by building level teams to support SEL at each school.

Increased SEL and Mental Health services are a central focus in supporting students, families, and staff with the transition back to school. Students can be referred for additional support by teachers or counselors, working through the school's Student Support Team (SST) process. SSTs meet weekly to discuss students who have been referred and may be struggling or who are high-risk, as well as students whose level of engagement on the school's engagement tracker may indicate cause for concern. The SST discusses possible student support interventions and works with the student's parent/guardian to develop a plan for the appropriate intervention.

In large part due to increased referrals for mental health supports during the Emergency Closure period, we nearly doubled our embedded counseling services during the emergency closure due to Covid-19 last Spring. Nearly 200 students are actively participating in telecounseling. Additionally, we have budgeted for our partners, which include Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA), Home for Little Wanderers (HFLW), and Riverside, to increase services further in the Fall. We recognize this is a challenging time and will provide comprehensive student mental health screenings and support throughout the year. School level counselors will continue to play a vital role in supporting students as they transition back to school remotely or in person.

SPS developed an engagement tracker in the Spring of 2020. The tracker helps to identify students struggling with remote learning, includes home visits as needed and as deemed safe, and allows the placement of additional supports and services to facilitate engagement. The information gathered through these

trackers helped direct our counseling and embedded therapy staff to the students and families who needed support throughout the summer. The use and refinement of the tracker will continue into the Fall as part of our Student Support Team essential data to inform tiered intervention referrals.

504 ACCOMMODATIONS

Students on a 504 accommodation plan will continue to be supported as noted in their accommodation plan, to the extent possible. Accommodation plans are reviewed annually to determine if any changes in supports being provided need to be made. Building based counselors will work with teachers and parents to review individual plans and accommodations at the start of the 2020-21 school year to determine the best way to provide support remotely. Parents will be notified of accommodations that cannot be reasonably met through a remote learning mode and our Student Support Office will work collaboratively with parents and local school counselors to problem solve.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR SEL

Professional learning opportunities have been offered during the summer and will continue throughout the school year supporting educators in incorporating SEL into regular instructional practices regardless of the learning model. These include an opportunity to focus on Covid-19 specific learnings; for example Understanding Trauma and Trauma-Sensitive Schools in the Midst of Covid-19 was offered by Riverside Trauma Center Staff during the summer to help prepare teachers to engage empathetically in conversation around the changes students are experiencing as a result of the pandemic. SPS is also offering learning opportunities around self-care to support teachers in actively supporting themselves. Our SEL curriculum Second Step will be supplemented by age appropriate lessons that will support students in processing emotions brought on by Covid-19 and other recent events.

FOCUS ON STUDENTS' SOCIAL EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19

We recognize that the experiences of the past 6 months have had adverse effects on our students. Our administrators, support staff and teachers will use an equitable, empathetic, trauma informed lens when supporting students' social emotional and mental health needs. The emphasis will be on incorporating social emotional learning as a core component of students' learning experience regardless of the model, and using proactive restorative interventions to assist students through any social-emotional challenges they may be facing. In addition, we will be working with community partners including Community Schools, Somerville Parks and Recreation, Breakthrough Greater Boston, Citizen Schools and others to develop opportunities for students to come together in safe social distancing outside to support their social emotional needs.

The Student Support Team (SST) structure in our schools plays a critical role in identifying and quickly addressing emerging social-emotional or mental health issues that students may be facing. A school's SST includes school administrators, counselors, redirects, outsourced embedded clinicians, Special Education Department supervisors, Supervisors of Attendance, and representatives from the district's Student Services team. The SST meets weekly for an hour to discuss students who have surfaced as in need of additional support. The team discusses each student and identifies possible interventions that could support the student in crisis. An action plan is developed for each student and one member of the team takes responsibility for ensuring that the steps identified in a students' plan are implemented, including following up with the student's teacher, parent, and/or service provider.

The model for social and emotional learning in the district will continue to develop and evolve as we engage students and adults in the plan for fall learning. Additionally, models for receiving feedback on the effectiveness of the learning materials, provided experience, and implementation will help to shape future iterations of SEL instruction in the district. The SPS SEL Task Force will continue to meet throughout the school year to assess the impact of our efforts

and to address current and emerging social emotional learning trends and priorities. School-based SEL teams will be formed to support teachers with Second Step and community-building, and to conduct mental health check-ins with students. In addition, school counselors are creating an online Counselor Corner SEL classroom as another way to provide support for students and teachers.

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