



SERVING THE WHOLE PERSON

Supporting Learner Health, Safety, and Wellness
Spotlighting Success in Michigan

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February 2023



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Suggested citation: Petersen, J., Pfister, T., & Walrond, N. (2023). *Supporting learner health, safety, and wellness: Spotlighting success in Michigan*. WestEd.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Support for this report was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation. The mixed-methods research process used to identify the exemplary school districts featured in this report, led by the national Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety at WestEd, would not have been possible without the insight and thought partnership of dedicated Michigan Department of Education leaders, including Bersheril Bailey, Leisa Gallagher, Phoebe Gohs, Lauren Kazee, Mary Teachout, and Amy Wassmann.

The authors would also like to thank the staff from every local educational agency who participated in the research interviews that led to the identification of these bright spot districts. Finally, the authors would like to thank Theresa Pfister, Shannon Nemer, and Jacquelyn Tran for their support with data collection and analysis. We would also like to thank Ruthie Caparas for her leadership and guidance that made this project possible.



INTRODUCTION

“We don’t assume children know algebra when they spring from the womb. We know that they don’t know algebra. We have to teach them algebra. We have to teach them this [social and emotional learning], as well. It can be woven into core content, into social studies for example, into math, into science, into language arts, but it has to be taught. Kids need to experience it, kids need to learn it, kids need to work with one another on it.”

— DR. MICHAEL RICE, STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION, MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, [ON A VISIT TO FERNDALE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN 2020](#)

Under the leadership of Governor Whitmer and State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice, leaders in Michigan have outlined clear equity and well-being goals for the state’s young people. In this context, this report highlights “bright spots” throughout the state—districts that have been successfully implementing key social and emotional learning (SEL) practices that are aligned with the state’s priorities, which are made concrete in *Michigan’s Top 10 Strategic Education Plan*. The plan offers a vision of providing each learner with “an inspiring, engaging, and caring learning environment that fosters creative and critical thinkers who believe in their ability to positively influence Michigan and the world beyond” (Michigan State Board of Education, n.d.). The plan also aims to serve all students “regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, economic status, native language, physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities,” prioritizing closing “achievement and opportunity gaps.”

One of the eight key goals that the state’s plan articulates is to “improve the health, safety, and wellness of all learners.” Research highlights the positive impact of SEL programs on numerous student outcomes, including communication, collaboration, and academic performance (Mahoney et al., 2018). Further, SEL programs and whole-person approaches to learning have been found to produce positive benefits in a wide array of attitudinal, behavioral, and emotional outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011).

To achieve this goal, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has deepened its investment in SEL as an essential approach to serving the needs of the whole child. For example, the MDE has developed the Early Childhood to Grade 12 Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies, which provide a framework to help educators and caregivers understand the developmental progression of SEL skills. The five competencies build from a framework developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Michigan Department of Education, 2017). The MDE also received a Michigan Health Endowment Fund grant to offer a community of practice to support 19 districts as they infuse SEL competencies throughout all their schools. To build educator capacity for engaging with the competencies, the agency also offers a free, online *Introduction to SEL* course that provides an insight into SEL and outlines initial steps of integrating SEL into district, school, and classroom policies, programs, and practices (Michigan Virtual University, n.d.). Finally, to help address the SEL and mental health needs of children across Michigan, the MDE has established an SEL and Children’s Mental Health Network of state stakeholders with input from national experts as well as members from all 10 Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators (MASA) regions (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.b). This framework and supporting online professional learning are promoted through an outreach campaign: *Children Matter. You Matter. Learn SEL!* (For more on these initiatives, see the Resources section at the end of this paper.)



How Michigan Defines Social and Emotional Learning

Michigan works closely with CASEL and uses CASEL’s definition of SEL as “the process of developing students’ and adults’ social and emotional competencies—the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that individuals need to make successful choices. SEL helps make individuals understand and regulate their emotions, successfully complete goals, take others’ perspective or point of view, develop positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.a). The framework orients these competencies inside a series of concentric circles illustrating the settings in which young people learn and develop: classrooms, schools, families and caregivers, and communities (see Exhibit A).

Exhibit A. CASEL Framework



Source: CASEL, used with permission



Discovering Bright Spot Districts

This report builds on the work of the MDE’s Social Emotional Learning Workgroup, which—as part of carrying out its charge of demonstrating impact for improving the health, safety, and well-being of all of Michigan’s learners—has sought to identify “bright spots” among Michigan districts implementing SEL practices to improve outcomes for children. The group has articulated three goals:

- Learn as a team more about how Michigan districts were approaching SEL.
- Identify districts in diverse settings that use high-impact SEL practices.
- Highlight those districts as “bright spots” so that their peer districts could explore these practices.

To help identify bright spots in Michigan, the national Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety (CISELSS) at WestEd supported the work group in using WestEd’s guide, *Spotlighting Whole-Person Success: A Guide for Using Statewide Data to Identify Exemplar Districts in SEL and School Climate* (Caparas, 2021). The guide offers a mixed-methods research approach to successfully identify district exemplars.

Based on an understanding of the variation in Michigan’s rural, suburban, and urban districts, and after identifying demographic subgroups that are representative of the disparate experiences of Michigan’s school districts, the CISELSS team followed a multistep process to identify relevant bright spots throughout the state in each geographic category. The aim was to offer a range of powerful examples so that other districts could identify and learn from a district with a similar context to their own (see Table 1). First, the team analyzed statewide outcome data from several sources to find districts with strong performance on one or more SEL indicators (such as attendance rates, graduation rates, and/or suspension data). Then, to narrow the field, the team probed further into staff indicators (such as teacher longevity and/or student-to-counselor ratio) and academic performance (such as growth or proficiency in math and/or English language arts and/or college readiness). From examining these data, the team identified districts with positive student outcomes across one or more indicators and then compiled these districts into a short list of finalist districts from each district type. Finally, the team conducted interviews with leaders, educators, and school counselors from the districts to deepen their understanding of how the districts may have intentionally and effectively implemented SEL or whole-person initiatives that could positively impact various outcomes.

The “bright spot” districts that emerged were able to share evidence-based practices in SEL that promote positive outcomes in one or more critical areas for a variety of populations and contexts. Their identification as bright spots does not suggest that they have exemplary performance in all aspects of achieving equitable whole-person outcomes or in every aspect of SEL implementation; rather, they have had distinct success in specific areas worthy of deeper study.

Table 1 provides a high-level description of the bright spots, their district type, and their size.

Table 1. District Types and Identified Bright Spots

District type and finalists	Characteristics	Number of districts
Rural-Remote Bright spot district finalist: <i>Stephenson Area Public Schools</i>	Rural >25 miles away from an urban area	75
Rural-Town Bright spot district finalists: <i>Pickford Public Schools</i> <i>New Buffalo Area Schools</i>	Rural or town areas 10–35 miles away from an urbanized area	347
Suburban Bright spot district finalists: <i>Rochester Community School District</i> <i>Grand Haven Area Public Schools</i>	Territory outside a city and within an urbanized area with population >100,000 < 250,000	244
Urban Bright spot district finalist: <i>Troy School District</i>	City Population >250,000	65
Urban-Underserved Bright spot district finalists: <i>Cesar Chavez Academy Public Schools of the City of Muskegon</i>	City Population >250,000 >90% students of color >80% students identified as economically disadvantaged	91



Key Strategies for Success

The CISELSS team identified four key evidence-based strategies that these districts' leaders and educators are using to foster SEL and well-being:

- **Building strong developmental relationships:** Developmental relationships are close, trustworthy, purposeful relationships that support learning and development (Li & Julian, 2012). The BELE Network (<https://belenetwork.org/>) offers a variety of evidence-based strategies for investing in the relationships of learning communities.

Several bright spot districts are investing time, energy, and resources into ensuring that students are known well by the adults in their schools.

- **Developing authentic partnerships with families and the community:** Learning and development are contextual, so equitable approaches to promoting social and emotional well-being must include strengths-based partnerships with the families and communities of the young people that districts serve. In 2021, Dr. Karen Mapp updated her Dual Capacity Framework, developed for the U.S. Department of Education, to introduce and illustrate the idea of an equity-centered approach to family engagement (Mapp & Bergman, 2021).

Several bright spot districts emphasize forming active partnerships with families to support students and with community organizations to extend and strengthen that support even further.

- **Prioritizing investment in adults:** Teachers and other school staff members create the conditions for young people to thrive. Therefore, educators' well-being is important to the school environment. In order to lead healthy relationships with young people, the adults need to attend to their own needs. A variety of practical strategies for this purpose have emerged through the pandemic (Pate, 2020).

Several bright spot districts have invested in professional learning and supports for adults that are focused on mental health and SEL.

- **Implementing an evidence-based SEL curriculum:** Explicit SEL instruction is often described as a critical strategy for promoting SEL competencies and skills (Durlak et al., 2011). CASEL offers a guide to schoolwide SEL that provides tools and resources to support the implementation of evidence-based SEL programs (CASEL, 2019).

Several bright spot districts actively use available evidence-based frameworks and curricula to ensure students master SEL competencies.

The strategies employed by the bright spot districts highlighted in this report are aligned with the state's guiding principles as articulated in *Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan*. The principles include ensuring that students "have voice in their own learning, feel connected to their schools, and have authentic, meaningful relationships with educators"; families and communities "are essential partners of teachers, support staff, and administrators in the education of students"; the MDE "collaborates with school districts and a wide range of partners and stakeholders"; and educators "have the resources, support, and training needed to educate students" (Michigan State Board of Education, n.d.).

Table 2 provides a summary of each bright spot and key strategies for success.

Table 2. Key Strategies of the Bright Spots

School System	Developmental Relationships	Authentic Family and Community Partnerships	Adult Professional Learning	Evidence-Based Curriculum
Stephenson Area Public Schools	District focus	Not a district focus	Not a district focus	District focus
Pickford Public Schools	Not a district focus	District focus	District focus	District focus
New Buffalo Area Schools	District focus	District focus	District focus	District focus
Rochester Community School District	Not a district focus	District focus	District focus	Not a district focus
Grand Haven Area Public Schools	District focus	District focus	Not a district focus	District focus
Troy School District	District focus	Not a district focus	District focus	Not a district focus
Cesar Chavez Academy	District focus	District focus	Not a district focus	Not a district focus
Public Schools of the City of Muskegon	District focus	Not a district focus	District focus	Not a district focus



BRIGHT SPOT DISTRICTS IN MICHIGAN

“You can’t talk about SEL without talking about diversity, equity, and inclusion because when you’re suspending one population of kids disproportionately to the rest, that becomes an equity issue.”

— ROCHESTER DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR

Bright spots of SEL practices that promote equitable access, experiences, and outcomes are happening throughout Michigan. The eight districts highlighted in this paper represent just a fraction of those in the state. There are others to discover, celebrate, and learn from.

Each bright spot’s description in this report includes specific details to help build the reader’s understanding of the district’s practices and how those practices work within that school community and context.

The bright spots are listed by district type, from rural to suburban to urban contexts.

District Type: Rural-Remote

District: Stephenson Area Public Schools

Enrollment: 460 students

Table 3. Demographics of Stephenson Area Public Schools

Economically disadvantaged	American Indian or Alaska Native students	Asian students	Black or African American students	Hispanic or Latino students	White students
45%	<1%	<1%	0%	4%	94%

Key Strategies: Developmental Relationships, Evidence-Based Curriculum

“We’ve been very intentional about building relationships, and not just starting new initiatives or new programs, but really making it a part of our culture at Stephenson, so that when a student walks into our school, they know that we are here for them. They’re welcome. They’re loved, they’re cared about. And I think it goes beyond just being intentional. And we make sure we have all hands on deck. Not just training your teachers and your teaching staff on it but making your bus drivers aware of what you’re doing, [the] kitchen staff ... simple things such as making a goal of starting by greeting your kids every morning.”

— KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

Stephenson is a rural-remote district in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan with high graduation rates, high attendance rates, and low suspension rates. At Stephenson, SEL curricula and learning are embedded in all classrooms and delivered and reinforced by all staff with the support of a Behavioral Health Assessment Team. Stephenson leaders and educators believe in the importance of *all* relationships. Their “all hands on deck” model means that everyone, including bus drivers and kitchen staff, is part of the crew greeting students at the beginning of every day. They want students to know that adults are there for them the moment they walk into the school building. Stephenson uses the Michigan Model for Health (MMH), offered by the MDE and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. This comprehensive health education program is rooted in SEL and development and provides a lesson-based approach that includes SEL lessons and has been found effective through a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in 2011. In addition to having the online Suite 360 SEL curriculum

throughout K–12, students in grades 3 through 12 use materials from Transforming Research into Action to Improve the Lives of Students (TRAILS) to recognize and address anxious and depressive thoughts, and students in grades 10 and 11 learn teen mental health first aid.

District Type: Rural-Town

District: *Pickford Public Schools*

Enrollment: 440 students

Table 4. Demographics of Pickford Public Schools

Economically disadvantaged	American Indian or Alaska Native students	Asian students	Black or African American students	Hispanic or Latino students	White students
36%	24%	<2%	2%	<1%	73%

Key Strategies: Authentic Family and Community Partnerships, Adult Professional Learning, Evidence-Based Curriculum

“We need to remember that the shift to SEL isn’t something that happens overnight. It will take years to fully implement. We are building a system of support for all students to meet their needs and prepare them to communicate effectively, demonstrate self-control, think critically, persevere, and adjust to change. Our job is to provide a safe, secure, and inclusive environment where all children can learn and grow.”

— *TEACHER*

Located in the state’s Upper Peninsula, Pickford is a rural-town district with high graduation rates and low suspension rates. At Pickford, district leaders prioritize integrating SEL into all learning. They do so through professional learning communities (PLCs), book studies, and partnerships with counselors to ensure that teachers have the opportunity to study, plan, and implement instructional strategies that support the development of SEL competencies. Using the MMH, Second Step, and a prioritization of relationships, they ensure all students receive the SEL learning support they need. Further, Pickford has strong community connections that enhance the support they provide on campus. The district has 125 American Indian/Alaska Native students out of 440 total students; the vast majority of these students are registered members of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians. The district’s Title VI Native American Coordinator checks in with Native students regularly to help address generational

trauma and increase their attendance and academic performance; the coordinator has also helped the district access financial resources to support these students' basic needs where needed. The district has a strong relationship with the Eastern Upper Peninsula Intermediate School District (EUPISD)—a regional service and support agency—as well as with the statewide Hiawatha Behavioral Health nonprofit organization. District leaders also work with local businesses, pastors, therapists, and other organizations to provide financial and counseling support to families in need. The EUPISD has also created a PLC for Native American advisors in the state's Upper Peninsula to collaborate and learn from a local Cultural Competence Consultant.

District: New Buffalo Area Schools

Enrollment: 570 students

Table 5. Demographics of New Buffalo Area Schools

Economically disadvantaged	American Indian or Alaska Native students	Asian students	Black or African American students	Hispanic or Latino students	White students
44%	0%	1%	3%	11%	82%

Key Strategies: Developmental Relationships, Authentic Family and Community Partnerships, Adult Professional Learning, Evidence-Based Curriculum

“As a system, we really focus on each individual child.... And so we have a team of professionals that’s focusing on the needs of each individual child. So we want to make sure that they never feel like they’re a number. So in terms of attendance, if a student’s not here, we’re checking on them, finding out, ‘Hey, what’s going on? What do you need?’”

— SUPERINTENDENT

New Buffalo is a rural-town district in the southwest corner of the state with a high counselor-to-student ratio, good teacher longevity, and strong academic results. New Buffalo leaders and educators help develop relationships with and among students through schoolwide activities, classroom work, small-group interventions, and individual counseling support open to all students. New Buffalo’s whole-child focus is evident through the presence of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS); a student and staff SEL curriculum that includes CharacterStrong and TRAILS; and the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment, an SEL screener that has been found effective through multiple studies. A staff member in a new Student Advocate position also helps to support students who need extra

help with maintaining attendance, completing homework, or boosting motivation. Staff members also encourage students to reflect throughout the day using class “bell ringers” (open reflection/ check-in), “brain break” walks outside to get the body moving, and mindfulness practices to recenter in classrooms throughout the day. The district has worked with BetterLesson to support staff members’ understanding of SEL and shore up their own mental wellness. New Buffalo also prioritizes community partnerships. For instance, they have developed community connections to support student well-being through partnership work with Neighbor by Neighbor, Women’s Service League, and Rotary Club. The district also receives financial support for students and families from the Pokagon Fund supported by local casino revenues, from a benevolent fund supported by the receipts of shoppers at the local Barney’s Market grocery store, and even from college scholarships for graduating seniors.

District Type: Suburban

District: Rochester Community School District

Enrollment: 15,100 students

Table 6. Demographics of Rochester Community School District

Economically disadvantaged	American Indian or Alaska Native students	Asian students	Black or African American students	Hispanic or Latino students	White students
14%	<1%	15%	3%	7%	71%

Key Strategies: Authentic Family and Community Partnerships, Adult Professional Learning

“Perhaps the most important point of emphasis is that this work is unlike curricular or instructional change. It is a mindset shift, a systemic district focus, not a series of events. It will require an ongoing process, not a time-bound solution. When the social-emotional work is truly being implemented, it will not require additional tasks; it will be a way of life.”

— SUPERINTENDENT

Rochester is a suburban school district located in the southeast of the state that has high graduation and attendance rates and strong results across all academics. At Rochester, diversity, equity, inclusion, and SEL are deeply intertwined. “You can’t talk about SEL without talking about diversity, equity, and inclusion because when you’re suspending one population of kids disproportionately to the rest, that becomes an equity issue,” says one Rochester district administrator. Several years ago, the

school launched a task force focused on SEL and on physical health, including addiction, in response to school-level requests for more data and training. “We talked to parents and stakeholder groups and really dug deep into our data,” says the administrator. “It was initiated at a building level, quite honestly, as we talked about it. Our administrators came to us and said, ‘We really need training and restorative practices.’” Since then, staff members have participated in cultural proficiency training and restorative practices; and starting next year, each campus will have an SEL team. Mental health needs have become an even greater priority since COVID-19 began, so Rochester has prioritized training on trauma-informed instruction, mindfulness rooms, regular staff meetings to review how students are doing, and mandatory debriefings with a psychologist in the event of a crisis to benefit both students and staff. The district has also started working with community partners such as Honor Community Health to provide wraparound health services within several of its schools, including providing a mental health expert.

District: Grand Haven Area Public Schools

Enrollment: 5,700 students

Table 7. Demographics of Grand Haven Area Public Schools

Economically disadvantaged	American Indian or Alaska Native students	Asian students	Black or African American students	Hispanic or Latino students	White students
31%	<1%	<2%	<2%	6%	87%

Key Strategies: Developmental Relationships, Authentic Family and Community Partnerships, Evidence-Based Curriculum

“There has been a humongous concerted effort to make every single person feel welcomed and included when they come into this building every day. So we want them to know that stepping outside of their story and showing up for someone else is extremely important. We do all kinds of things every day to support students behaving as Team GH (Grand Haven) and that means Together, working towards Excellence, holding one another Accountable, and always being Mindful beyond ourselves.”

— PRINCIPAL

Grand Haven is a suburban district located in Western Michigan that has high graduation rates and low suspension rates. The district’s values include a culture of caring, and its current strategic plan

includes social and emotional wellness as a goal. Grand Haven has prioritized suicide prevention. Not only are district social workers, administrators, and all staff trained in the Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR) approach for suicide prevention, but all students receive the same training by graduation. Grand Haven’s commitment to SEL also ensures the well-being of students. SEL curricula are used throughout K–12, starting with Second Step and shifting into more developmentally appropriate designs in middle and high school, including mindfulness and some early use of materials from TRAILS. Through a grant with the district’s regional Ottawa Area Intermediate School District, the high school now has five counselors and four social workers on campus every day, with at least one social worker on all other campuses. The district also has community partnerships with outside organizations—including Spectrum Health for suicide prevention, Mosaic Counseling for supplemental therapy, and the Green Haven Area Community Foundation for financial support of SEL initiatives.

District Type: Urban

District: Troy School District

Enrollment: 12,800 students

Table 8. Demographics of Troy School District

Economically disadvantaged	American Indian or Alaska Native students	Asian students	Black or African American students	Hispanic or Latino students	White students
14%	<1%	39%	4%	4%	48%

Key Strategies: Developmental Relationships, Adult Professional Learning

“I personally believe that programs don’t teach kids, teachers teach kids, and we need to invest in the adults in our organization who have the most direct day-to-day contact with students. That’s what drives relationships, which ultimately drives belonging, which drives achievement.”

— SUPERINTENDENT

Troy is an urban school district with high attendance and graduation rates, a low suspension rate, and high scores across all academics. At Troy, district leaders have been committed to the social and emotional welfare of staff and students since their 2015 strategic plan. They also understand that in order to ensure the social and emotional development of their students, they must ensure the same for their staff. They invest in the adults in the school by helping teachers learn about trauma-informed

instruction and SEL practices through monthly learning sessions and by ensuring that teachers work together as teams to support students and one another. When staff are well taken care of, relationships can blossom. At Troy, everyone knows everyone, and they deepen these connections through staff and student involvement in activities such as clubs, sports, and other after-school activities. “We know that when students belong, they come to school, they feel better about themselves, they have better attendance, they have lower levels of discipline,” says a district administrator.

District Type: Urban-Underserved

District: *Cesar Chavez Academy*

Enrollment: 2,200 students

Table 9. Demographics of Cesar Chavez Academy

Economically disadvantaged	American Indian or Alaska Native students	Asian students	Black or African American students	Hispanic or Latino students	White students
98%	<1%	0%	3%	93%	4%

Key Strategies: Developmental Relationships, Authentic Family and Community Partnerships

“Relationships are everything to our kids, with the staff, and then our relationship as administrators with the staff we really focus on as well. Having a caring environment [matters]. [I]t sounds simple, but we care about you being able to take care of your family, and for the kids. We care about you. Your future. Your well-being.”

— *SCHOOL LEADER*

Cesar Chavez is a charter school district in Detroit with attendance and graduation rates that are above average for its district type and with a relatively low dropout rate. Cesar Chavez knows that to truly serve its students, the school must first build a community. Doing so is only possible if attendance is high and relationships are strong. In order to increase attendance, Cesar Chavez partnered with Attendance Works and has incorporated attendance support in their multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) structure. The school has two AmeriCorps volunteers who focus exclusively on attendance and work with families to determine what support they need to get students to school; these volunteers also mentor students directly to build students’ own problem-solving skills. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, school leaders, instructional coaches, and other staff even conducted home visits to chronically absent students to ensure the best possible chance of learning. To provide students

with what they need to succeed throughout the year, Cesar Chavez staff partner with families and local organizations to address concerns such as food insecurity. Together, focusing on attendance and relationships, Cesar Chavez helps to create the necessary conditions for students to thrive.

District: Public Schools of the City of Muskegon

Enrollment: 3,500 students

Table 10. Demographics of Public Schools of the City of Muskegon

Economically disadvantaged	American Indian or Alaska Native students	Asian students	Black or African American students	Hispanic or Latino students	White students
89%	<1%	39%	59%	14%	18%

Key Strategies: Developmental Relationships, Adult Professional Learning

“Please take responsibility for the energy you bring into our school. Your words matter. Your behaviors matter. Our students, staff, parents, and community members matter. Take a slow deep breath and make sure your energy is in check before entering. We are building a healthy spirit, mind, and body for all herein.”

— ENTRY SIGN TO MUSKEGON HIGH SCHOOL’S FRESHMAN ACADEMY

Muskegon is an urban school district with attendance and graduation data on par with the state average and with high teacher longevity. At Muskegon, SEL and wellness are priorities, particularly in its high school. The high school recently created a “freshman academy” with a focus on the supportive relationships with staff and teachers and a schedule that meets academic needs as well as social, emotional, and mental health needs. The academy provides a transition to help ensure students can make it all the way through high school. “Helping students to find success in the 9th grade year allows the student to transition into 10th grade, which buys them the time and mind maturity to see the light at the end of the tunnel,” says the superintendent. The school employs an SEL Wellness Coordinator focused on the freshmen, but SEL is incorporated across the school, including in its health curriculum. Every Friday afternoon, staff throughout the district receive professional learning that is based on each school’s local context and often includes SEL strategies. All staff throughout the district are in the process of completing training on trauma-informed instruction. This commitment and structure have helped more than twice as many 9th graders to promote to 10th grade than in previous years and encourages continuous improvement for SEL instruction across the district.



CONCLUSION

This paper strives to recognize the incredible work of Michigan districts serving the well-being needs of their young people. By investing in developmental relationships with students, fostering supportive partnerships with families and members of the community, prioritizing investment in the adults in the district through related professional learning, and implementing evidence-based SEL curricula, these districts seek to ensure that each young person has the learning environment they need to succeed.

These strategies may even protect students from the effects of change or crisis and may bolster learning in a range of instructional settings. A [recent study from the Education Policy Innovation Collaborative at Michigan State University](#) focused on districts with better-than-predicted gains in student performance on benchmark assessments during the 2020/21 school year in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that these districts' leaders "prioritized social-emotional learning and individualized instructional support to facilitate engagement in student learning, with a particular focus on building students' connection with peers and educators"—regardless of whether their instructional modality was in person, remote, or a hybrid of the two approaches (Hashim et al., 2022).

In order to help make Michigan's vision and values a reality for every child in the state, the authors of this bright spots report hope that leaders and educators in each of Michigan's diverse districts find inspiration from at least one school system in this report. Through peer learning opportunities (such as from communities of practice and site visits) and by exchanging resources, district and school staff may learn from and alongside these bright spot school systems about the best ways to support Michigan students' well-being so that district and school staff may positively influence their communities, the state, and the world beyond.



RESOURCES

The state of Michigan has several additional resources that leaders and educators from other states may find valuable. The descriptions of each resource come from within the resource itself or from state webpages that describe the resources.

Connecting Social and Emotional Learning to Michigan’s School Improvement Framework: Guidance and Resources for K–12 and Early Childhood Settings

Download [Connecting Social and Emotional Learning to Michigan’s School Improvement Framework: Guidance and Resources for K–12 and Early Childhood Settings](#) (PDF).

One of the MDE’s primary goals as outlined in [Michigan’s Top 10 Strategic Education Plan](#) is to support whole-child development. As part of this plan, a guide was developed to strategically align, integrate, and leverage the state’s efforts and provide Michigan educators with activities and examples of how to promote and reinforce social and emotional competency development. Specifically, the MDE developed this guide to support Michigan educators and caregivers in integrating SEL into the fabric of the school at all levels, including early childhood settings. To do this, the guide identifies targeted SEL activities that align with Michigan’s Continuous Improvement Planning. When used together, the SEL Competencies and the guide provide educators and caregivers with strategies, activities, and guidance to support the social, emotional, and academic development of all learners in a coordinated and systematic way across all programs and settings both in and out of school.

Introduction to SEL

View the [Introduction to SEL online course](#) at Michigan Virtual.

The MDE has launched an outreach plan: “Children Matter. You Matter. Learn SEL!” Part of this plan asks educators to complete the [Introduction to SEL online module](#) hosted at Michigan Virtual. The goal is to have as many educators as possible complete the module, at minimum one leader and two to four teachers per school building. The course is free and offers state continuing education hours.

Michigan Department of Education Early Childhood to Grade 12 Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies and Indicators

Download [Early Childhood to Grade 12 Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) Competencies and Indicators](#) (PDF).

As a first step to encouraging educators and caregivers to approach teaching and learning with a holistic lens that addresses both human and academic development, the MDE developed the Early Childhood to Grade 12 SEL Competencies and Indicators. This document provides a framework to help educators and caregivers understand learners' developmental progression of SEL skills from birth through grade 12, as well as skill-building strategies to support successful mastery of college and career readiness standards.

Michigan Department of Education Social–Emotional Learning Page

Visit the [Social–Emotional Learning page](#) on the MDE's website.

This webpage is filled with resources to help support SEL implementation across Michigan. For more information or questions regarding SEL, please email MDE-selresources@michigan.gov.

Michigan Department of Education School Mental Health Resources

Visit the [MDE's listing of mental health resources](#) for schools.

The MDE provides a webpage that offers resources, links, materials, and websites that are related to mental health and its importance in the school setting.

Michigan Model for Health and CASEL SEL Competencies Alignment

Download the [Michigan Model for Health and CASEL SEL Competencies Alignment](#) overview document (PDF).

This document describes key components of the health standards, skills, and topics of the MMH and of the state's SEL Competencies and the overall big picture of how these sources align with each other. The document also has a smaller grain–size illustration of the alignment of MMH by grade level, topic, learning objective, and standards with the SEL Competencies and their key indicators.

Michigan Social Emotional Learning Alliance

Visit the [Michigan Social Emotional Learning Alliance](#) website.

The Michigan SEL Alliance (MiSELA) began in October of 2017 when a group of higher education professionals and state government staff met to network and share about their respective work in the field of SEL. During that inaugural meeting, the participants (from the MDE, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Michigan State University, Eastern Michigan University, and University of Michigan) decided to meet at least twice a year to connect and explore ways to collaborate and support one another's efforts. Other universities were invited to join, and in March 2018, representatives from Ferris State University and Wayne State University joined the consortium. This group officially named itself the Michigan SEL Alliance in October 2018 and continues to meet twice a year, with representation from education associations, local districts, and Oakland University also now included. Its mission is to advance knowledge and practices for SEL with the goal of implementing high-quality SEL in communities throughout the state at all levels of practice, from working with individuals and families to developing SEL policy.

SEL and Children's Mental Health Network

View an overview of the state's [SEL and Children's Mental Health Network](#) (PowerPoint slide).

To help address the SEL and mental health needs of children across Michigan, the MDE has established an SEL and Children's Mental Health Network of state stakeholders with input from national experts. Members of the network represent all 10 Michigan Association of School Administrator regions. The goals of the network are to help broaden, deepen, and strengthen efforts in SEL and children's mental health across the state. This work is essential and consistent with the state's strategic education plan goal—promoting the health, safety, and wellness of all learners (physically, socially, and emotionally).



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