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**Wisconsin Social and Emotional Learning
Case Study: Milwaukee Public Schools**

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Milwaukee Public Schools

Introduction/Background

HISTORY Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) has been utilizing social and emotional learning (SEL) for over 30 years; however our district-wide implementation began just a year and a half ago. Prior to that time, SEL implementation was a school-based decision, with some schools opting to implement and sustain a school-wide SEL curriculum over the course of years. At the district level, the Violence Prevention Program, a unique, multi-disciplinary team of school social workers, school psychologists, school safety assistants, school counselors, and teachers, has been working to support and grow the use of SEL strategies in district schools.

THE MODEL Beginning in 2016, MPS has been on a journey toward becoming a more trauma sensitive district. This began with a series of trauma sensitive schools (TSS) professional development modules presented to all teachers in the district, followed by the introduction of social and emotional learning as a trauma sensitive practice. This series introduced trauma and ACEs, addressed the impact of trauma on youth and the adults who work with traumatized youth, presented a framework for developing trauma sensitive classrooms and schools, described common instructional practices and how they support SEL, and finally introduced Second Step and Restorative Practices (RP) as specific tools for teaching and reinforcing SEL. Through the Violence Prevention Program, MPS is currently working to embed trauma sensitive practices, social and emotional learning, and restorative practices into the bedrock of the way our schools and district operate. This requires not only examining how these practices impact the students in our school communities, but the impact on adults as well. In all work, we maintain a strong working relationship with our PBIS staff as we are infusing this work into our multi-tiered system of support, always with an eye toward sustainability.

THE PLAYERS The Violence Prevention Program (VPP) is the hub of SEL work in the district; however there are numerous other individuals and departments which make this work possible. The Manager of School Social Work and Transition Services oversees the VPP and has been instrumental in moving SEL from a voluntary practice to a district mandate. She, along with the Senior Director of Specialized Services, have communicated the importance of TSS and SEL to a variety of district stakeholders and have advocated, developed partnerships, and received necessary permissions for VPP to implement this work. The training modules were provided by all of the district school social workers and school psychologists without whom this implementation plan would not have worked, and the managers and supervisors of both of these departments continue to allow the VPP time to train the staff to take on this new role. The PBIS supervisor and coaches are a valued partner to the VPP as we worked to figure out the integration of SEL and TSS into the multi-tiered framework at both the district and school levels. The professional development office has been a key player in permitting time for training to occur both at schools

throughout the year as well as for new educators and administrators. The VPP has also formed partnerships with academic leaders as part of our efforts to infuse SEL into academics.

Big Ideas from

INSTRUCTION Based on the research-to-practice brief, *Teaching the Whole Child: Instructional Practices that Support Social-Emotional Learning in Three Teacher Evaluation Frameworks*, from the Center for Great Teachers and Leaders at American Institutes for Research, teachers were presented with 10 common instructional practices, an explanation of how they can explicitly develop SEL skills in students, and time to reflect on their use of those practices. The VPP has also developed a teacher workshop entitled *Using Circles to Teach*, which demonstrates and instructs teachers how restorative practices can be used to teach academic curricula. The goal of this and continuing SEL professional development is to explicitly connect academic instruction and SEL.

SUSTAINABILITY Sustainability is a primary consideration for all of the work we do related to TSS and SEL. Prior to 2016, the model for TSS and SEL PD was that VPP trainers would provide PD at schools who requested the training. This posed significant challenges when faced with staff turnover and capacity of trainers to be present in all approximately 160 MPS schools. These challenges led to the development of the current video and facilitated activity module format of PD we now use to ensure a baseline understanding amongst all staff. All of the TSS and SEL PD modules are currently in the process of being transformed into online self-study courses hosted on our internal learning management system with embedded reflection breaks and checks for understanding. The completion of these courses will be monitored to ensure new district staff receive the same training current staff have already received. This model then allows the VPP staff to focus on PD to extend the learning from the TSS modules and supporting schools in moving from information to implementation.

EQUITY In the prior model, TSS and SEL training, consultation, and support were provided to schools on an as-requested basis. This led to an inequitable model of resource allocation, as MPS students were receiving SEL instruction at the discretion of their administration rather than based on need. Students now benefit from having all teachers understand trauma sensitive practices and social and emotional learning, and teach the same SEL curriculum no matter which MPS schools they attend. While SEL is just one strategy to begin to equalize the playing field, our current district-wide approach provides a consistent approach to this instruction for all students.

Conclusion

In MPS, we consider our TSS and SEL implementation a journey. While we have been creating systems to support and move SEL forward, there is a need to continue embedding these practices into our multi-tiered system of support and integrating SEL work with other district priorities including academics and cultural responsiveness. We have come a long way from where we started, but we recognize we have a long way to go to implement systematic, sustainable practices that contribute to the success of our students.