

# Supporting Students Through Social-Emotional Learning

MetroWest Kids Initiative – March 19, 2021



# Agenda

Welcome and Introductions

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# Welcome

## Senate President Karen Spilka

# Introductions



The mission of the Rennie Center is to improve public education through well-informed decision-making based on deep knowledge and evidence of effective policymaking and practice.



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# The Current Moment

COVID-19, Trauma, and Learning Loss

# The Impact of COVID-19

Collective and Individual Trauma

Disrupted Routines

Academic Learning Loss

# Trauma

COVID-19 has impacted the entire world, and brought with it subsequent trauma for students, families, educators, communities, and more.

In particular, the COVID-19 crisis has added to the deep layers of trauma and oppression felt among marginalized communities, making it essential for schools to apply an equity lens alongside trauma-sensitive and healing-centered practices.

- **Academic Difficulty:** Children who have experienced trauma may experience difficulty with memory, organizational skills, and verbal skills.
- **Behavioral Changes:** Children who have experienced trauma may exhibit internalizing symptoms, such as withdrawal, or externalizing symptoms, such as aggression.
- **Relationship Difficulty:** Children who have experienced trauma may have difficulty trusting adults and peers and they often lack appropriate social skills, making it difficult for children to form positive relationships.

# Disrupted Routines

COVID-19 has caused a widespread disruption to our daily lives. Whether at work, at school, or at home, families have been forced to adjust to long-term changes in their daily schedules.

These changes can mean a loss of skills gained during schooling or out-of-school time, and they can lead to increased anxiety, depression, and behavioral needs.







While all students are suffering, those who came into the pandemic with the fewest academic opportunities are on track to exit with the greatest learning loss." — McKinsey & Company, *COVID-19 and learning loss—disparities grow and students need help*

## What is the COVID Slide?

# What is Social-Emotional Learning?

How SEL positively impacts students who have experienced trauma

# Social-Emotional Learning

- **SEL** is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the **knowledge, skills, and attitudes** to:
- ◆ develop healthy identities,
  - ◆ manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals,
  - ◆ feel and show empathy for others,
  - ◆ establish and maintain supportive relationships, and
  - ◆ make responsible and caring decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning)



# Transformative SEL is...

- A process where students and teachers build **strong, respectful relationships** founded on an appreciation of similarities and differences; learn to critically **examine root causes of inequity**; and **develop collaborative solutions** to community and social problems (Measuring SEL, 2018).
- Transformative SEL is anchored in the notion of **justice-oriented citizenship**, with issues of **culture, identity, agency, belonging, and engagement** explored as relevant expressions of the five core SEL competencies (CASEL).



# Why does Transformative SEL matter now?



- Children returned to school this year grappling with the emotional impact of the global pandemic and nationwide confrontation with persistent racism.
- In addition to a **disrupted daily routine** and a **long period of isolation** from classmates, many students have experienced **widespread suffering** in their community, including joblessness, housing instability, illness, and economic insecurity.
- In this time, as in others, the **collective harm** has disproportionately impacted low-income communities and communities of color.

# Supporting Students' Wellbeing

Strategies for schools and communities

# Overview of Strategies

Build a Sense of Belonging



Support Student Voice and Agency



Develop Meaningful Family Partnerships



Social-Emotional Learning at Home



# Build a Sense of Belonging



**Routines and Rituals:** Transferring normal classroom routines and rituals can be a useful strategy to offer consistency and build trust and confidence within a remote learning environment. This can include **morning circles**, **weekly themes**, and **periodic check-ins**.

**Mentorship Programs:** Mentorship programs provide opportunities for students to interact with peers and adults, strengthen academic skills, and **form positive relationships**. Through a mentorship program, adults can serve as a trusted resource when students face challenges. In addition, peer mentoring can strengthen student relationships across the school.

**Affirm Student Identity:** Providing the space for students to explore and affirm their identities through **literature**, **classroom projects**, and **storytelling** can instill community and a healthy sense of self.





# Support Student Voice & Agency

**Provide opportunities for students to impact their community:** Empowering students to critique and dismantle the inequities they face in their communities, through capstone projects, 'Hopes and Dreams' identification, and other remote-friendly activities, can cultivate activism, social justice mindsets, and a positive connection with diverse communities.

**Provide voice and choice in the classroom:** Co-constructing rules and norms for remote learning, offering student-led video conferences, and incorporating student input into remote curriculum can foster a sense of safety and collaborative control among students.

**Provide voice and choice at the school level:** Administrators and educators can work with students to identify and recommend school climate improvement strategies, collaborate on decision-making processes like scheduling and hiring, and establish inclusive student government bodies.



# Develop Meaningful Family Partnerships



## Provide clear, two-way communication with families:

Map out who is responsible for **sharing out information**, through what channels, and in what necessary languages. Staff should connect with families to identify their preferred communication type. Communication should always be **inclusive** and utilize an **asset-based** lens.

## Create a range of opportunities for family involvement and connection:

Find opportunities to bring families together virtually or safely in person. This can include **virtual coffee chats**, **volunteer opportunities**, or **community events**. Ensure that bilingual staff or interpreters are present to **allow full participation** by non-English speaking families.

## Give families the tools to incorporate SEL at home:

Provide **tips and techniques** to families on how to incorporate **SEL at home**, including information on:

- Self-care
- Routines and intentionality
- Expression and naming of emotions
- Active listening

# SEL At Home: Strategies for Families

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# SEL At Home: Strategies for Families

**Play Every Day:** Every child should experience safe and healthy play. There are many activities that can get kids moving while teaching them social-emotional skills that are essential to helping kids combat stress and anxiety associated with the pandemic.

**Establish Household and Remote School Rules and Procedures:** Establishing procedures for managing health, learning new content, building relationships, and growing self-awareness and emotion management skills can help families and students who are learning at home.

**Build a Family Charter:** The Charter is a written document detailing how everybody in your home (or “virtual home”) wants to feel. You can do this for yourself, as a couple, or as an entire family. If you have children, depending on their age, they may need help with the writing part. But even young kids can share how they want to feel.



# SEL At Home: Strategies for Families

## Enhance and Practice Executive Function Skills:

Executive function and self-regulation skills provide critical supports for learning and development. There are many **developmentally appropriate activities** for families to strengthen various components of their child's executive function.

## Engage in Creativity Together:

Examples of **creativity** in action include cooking or baking together, doing puzzles, coloring or art projects, playing board games, or writing a poem or a song together.

## Model the Behavior You Seek:

Children mirror what they see their family doing, including the **behaviors and relationships** between family members. Don't forget to **foster self-esteem** in your children by giving them responsibilities, allowing them to make age-appropriate choices, and showing your appreciation to them.

# SEL At Home: Strategies for Parents

**Finally, don't go it alone.** Reach out to your child's teacher and school leader to ask for tips and tricks to implement social-emotional learning at home. Utilize resources online, like the following, to find what you are most comfortable doing with your child at home:

- 1 **CASEL's [Parent SEL Resources](#)** is a curated list of resources selected by CASEL staff that focus on the role of parents and parenting in social and emotional learning (SEL).
- 2 **UIC's [Parent Resources](#)** is a thoughtfully curated list of resources that might assist parents in learning more about social and emotional learning in schools or in their own parenting practices with their children
- 3 **Edutopia's [A Parent's Resource Guide to Social and Emotional Learning](#)** is a curated list of articles and videos for parents
- 4 **[The Parent Academy](#)** has a Virtual Campus of resources on many aspects of student support, including social emotional development

# Wrapping Up

Learn More and Q&A

# Learn More

Visit our website at  
[www.renniecenter.org/research/back-school-blueprint](https://www.renniecenter.org/research/back-school-blueprint) to read  
 our Action Guides and more!



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# What questions do you have?

Please type your questions in the Q&A box



# Panel Discussion

# Panel Discussion

**Annelise Eaton**

Research Director, Rennie Center

- **Katie Brown** | Transition Coordinator, Natick High School
- **John Crocker** | Director of School Mental Health and Behavioral Services, Methuen Public Schools
- **Tiffany Lillie** | Director of the Office of Community Resource Development, Framingham Public Schools

# Closing Out

## Senate President Spilka

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*How are state policymakers working to address these issues?*