VERMONT SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION

SEL Guidelines for School Reopening

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While much uncertainty surrounds how and when school will reopen, we know that social and emotional learning (SEL) will be critical to re-engaging students, supporting adults, rebuilding relationships, and creating a foundation for academic learning. This unprecedented shift to a new type of learning experience may have a lasting and profound impact on young people's academic, social, emotional, and life outcomes. School leaders will need to bring together administrators, teachers, school counselors, school staff, families, youth, and community partners to co-create supportive learning environments where all students and adults can enhance their social and emotional competencies, feel a sense of belonging, heal, and thrive.

Durlak, Weissberg et al.'s meta-analysis research of 213 rigorous studies of SEL in schools indicates that students receiving quality SEL instruction demonstrated:

- ➔ better academic performance: achievement scores an average of 11 percentile points higher than students who did not receive SEL instruction;
- ➔ improved attitudes and behaviors: greater motivation to learn, deeper commitment to school, increased time devoted to schoolwork, and better classroom behavior;
- ➔ fewer negative behaviors: decreased disruptive class behavior, noncompliance, aggression, delinquent acts, and disciplinary referrals; and
- ➔ reduced emotional distress: fewer reports of student depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal.

PMB 301 150 Dorset Street - South Burlington, VT 05403 ◆ vtsca.cloverpad.org ◆ vtsca.president@gmail.com

@VermontSCA @VermontSchoolCounselorAssociation @vtsca

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VTSCA SEL Reentry Task Force Members: Woody Belt (Johnson Elementary School) , Tara Cariano (Harwood Union High School), Tim Chamberlin (Lake Region High School), Lauren Conti (Stowe Middle School), Mark Gebo (Bellows Falls Union High School), Heather Haddick (Cold Hollow Career Center), Natalie Houde (Wells Village School and Middletown Springs Elementary School), Meg Hughart (Burlington High School), Lisa LaPlante (U-32), Hannah Parker (Townshend Elementary School), Rachel Petraska (Shelburne Community School) , Johanna Petrycki (Albany Community School and Brownington Central School), Patricia Tomashot (Stowe High School)

1. Establish a multidisciplinary decision making team

The VTSCA SEL Reentry Task Force recommends that every school in Vermont employs a licensed school counselor and follows the American School Counseling guidelines to ensure that all students are supported. Other recommendations:

- Include a school counselor on the return-to-school team
- Include a school counselor on the *Supervisory Union / School District team*
- Coordinate and communicate reentry plans across schools in the district or Supervisory Union
- Communicate reentry plans to all stakeholders and gather feedback from parents, students and community members How do we do this to reach all families, parents and guardians?
- Use resource mapping to identify current needs and resources
- Create common goals and plans for working towards those goals
- Provide scripts for educators to use in communicating with students when appropriate to ensure consistent messaging

2. Address staff/faculty SEL needs

- Recognize staff may have experienced their own loss or stressors connected to COVID-19
- Establish a system-wide approach to address stress and compassion fatigue
  - Create opportunities to integrate self-care & SEL into ALL school meetings
  - Allow space for connection and listening among adults in the building (eg. Restorative Practices circles)
  - To support staff, consider these Self-Care suggestions, so that it is integrated into the school culture rather than the individual responsibility of educators
- Provide professional development opportunities for faculty to learn how to support their own and students' SEL
- Consider hosting a regular check-in/or buddy systems among the faculty and staff
- Identify community resources available to support faculty & staff. Here are some examples:
  - Secondary Traumatic Stress
  - Compassion Fatigue
- Remind employees about the Vermont Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

3. Address SEL and mental health needs of students

- Use your **school's referral system** (MTSS, EST, SST, etc) for those who need targeted support (e.g., declining school performance, increased truancy, etc.)

- Create **plans** to help those where home is not a safe/comfortable place
- Consider utilizing **universal social & emotional screenings**
  - Create a clear purpose for screening and identify how the data will be analyzed and used
- Establish regular **informal check-ins** with all students especially in times of virtual learning (e.g., consider advisory systems or other current structures to support this effort)
- Facilitate **classroom meetings** to allow students to process their experience
- Consider the **impact of masks** on the ability to read emotions and facial expressions, follow speech, participate in speech-related interventions, and generally participate and focus on academics
- Consider implementing a universal tier 1 evidence-based **SEL curriculum** embedded in the curriculum via advisory, morning meeting, etc

4. **Relationships** and **transitions**

- Develop **plans for welcoming students** to school each day
- Enhance the current **advisory system/morning meeting time** to create authentic opportunities for daily check-ins
- Consider a **peer mentor program**, particularly for students who may be at risk of a challenging transition
- **Anticipate fatigue, sleepiness** & consider a gradual introduction to academic rigor
- **Avoid punitive approaches** when possible, consider implementing **restorative practices**
- Create opportunities for students to **voice concerns & needs**

5. Potential for trauma

Stressors that may put students at higher risk of trauma include:

- Parental substance use and abuse
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Child maltreatment
- Homelessness (and general worsening of poverty and economic gaps)
- Financial/food/occupational/housing insecurity
- Mental health issues or exacerbation of underlying issues
- Family separation (some were away and couldn't return, or not seeing loved ones)

In response to trauma, we should have clear agreements with local agencies (mental health, truancy, DCF).

Recognize **stigma** and **racism** that may occur as a result of COVID-19, including:

- Asian American students and staff
- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) who were targeted due to wearing masks in

public
- Undocumented students and families with no access to health care or who experienced detainment
- Those who have a family member who became sick or tested positive for COVID-19
- Those who have allergies or respiratory illnesses that may result in coughing or sneezing or medically unable to wear a mask

6. Address physical and psychological safety

Identify habits or systems to be put into place now to help **ensure** both **physical and psychological safety.**

- Establish **social distancing** and **sanitation** and **hygiene considerations** for settings where students are gathered closely (e.g., lunch, physical education classes, recess, transportation)
- Ensure specialized instructional support personnel (e.g, school counselors, school psychologists, speech language pathologists) **have adequate space** to conduct c**onfidential sessions while maintaining social distancing requirements**
- Establish **attendance and sanitation guidelines** for COVID19-related illness and **exposures** (e.g., what to do if a student or staff tests positive for COVID-19 vs. student or staff exposure to COVID-19)

7. Behavior

- Acknowledge students have had **inconsistent behavior and academic expectations** for the previous several months
  - **Anticipate student defiance or resistance** as a method of establishing control
- Focus on **positive and effective discipline practices** within a **multitiered system** of supports
- View **behaviors** through a **trauma-informed lens**. Implement **culturally responsive, restorative practices to address behavioral concerns**
- **Avoid punitive discipline** such as suspension or expulsion that forces the student to leave the school environment
- Consider **revising existing policies and practices** that may have inequitable or detrimental impact on students

8. Family engagement

- Continue efforts to **engage and communicate with families** & ensure that communications are easily accessible
- Provide **back to school/reentry activities** for families and students through orientations and open houses
- **Seek feedback from families** about their experience with remote learning and feelings about

the start of the school year to work towards a successful reentry through a **needs assessment**
- **Offer family education** on strategies they can use at home to **support reentry**

9. Access to school counselors and others with similar expertise

- **Ensure appropriate vs. inappropriate activities -** School counselors adhere to the appropriate activities for school counselors and advocate to eliminate inappropriate activities from workload.
- **Ensure all schools have a school counselor available to support students and families**
- Connect with **community partners** and providers to address gaps
- **Establish clear pathways for parents and students to connect** as needed and **increase accessibility virtually** by posting information on websites
- Find opportunities to support the **integration of SEL into all classes**
- Work towards **creating a plan for next year** about what supports and services may look like

10. Plan for the unexpected

The **structure of schooling may change** rapidly and differ from region to region. **Be prepared to pivot** to accommodate these changes.

- **Leverage community resources** (e.g., public libraries, local youth organizations) to provide activities that support student SEL and academic growth **on days students are not attending school in person**
- **Review the successes and challenges from current COVID-19–related school closures** to identify and address service gaps
- Reinforce the importance of **ongoing, relevant professional development** for faculty and staff
- **Develop and clearly communicate** decision points for **additional school closures and plans** to support students' academic, social and emotional, and mental and behavioral health needs

11. **School Reentry Powerpoint Presentation** (June 2020) This presentation was originally compiled by Stowe Middle/High School and later shared with the Vermont School Counselor Association SEL Reentry Task Force.

This document was composed by the Vermont School Counselor Association (VTSCA) Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Re-entry Task Force as recommendations to the Vermont Agency of Education, Vermont Principals Association, Vermont Superintendents Association, Vermont School Boards Association and VT-NEA for the reopening of Vermont schools due to COVID-19. It is a culmination of resources from The American School Counselor Association (ASCA), National Association of School Psychologist (NASP) , Collaborative for Academic and Social & Emotional Learning (CASEL) and Northeastern Family Institute (NFI).

Additional resources:

Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Roadmap for Reopening School for CASEL

Trauma-Informed SEL Toolkit from Transforming Education

Trauma Resource Center Websites from National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare

Trauma Sensitive Schools Online Professional Development from Wisconsin Department of Education

{Future recommendations on SEL Screeners, SEL Curriculum and Race & Equity will be forthcoming from VTSCA}