

**SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

## Taking Social Emotional Learning (SEL) From Fad to Formidable Trend

*Interview with  
Caitlin Dooley, PhD*



Caitlin Dooley, PhD

**GPAD:** For starters, would you please give our readers a working definition of the term social-emotional learning, or SEL?

**Dooley:** There is no prescribed definition of SEL in Georgia. I see that as a good thing. It allows districts and schools to derive their own definitions to support their local programming. And, of course, you know that the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has a definition that has widespread use [The CASEL definition and competencies appear on p. 5. See more about CASEL at <http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel/>]. The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence also does work in this area (see <http://ei.yale.edu>). I see social-emotional learning as the process

by which students are prepared for life by having adults emotionally connect with them. This can happen during the teaching-learning exchange—that connection is part of what motivates learners. I find it interesting that whenever I ask students or adults about their most memorable teacher, inevitably, they point to someone who made emotional connections with them during the classroom experience – no matter what the content was or the types of assessments that were used. So, for me, SEL is not a program, but an outcome that we want for all learners. It's that deep, enduring learning that individuals can recall years later based on the emotional connections made. It's what we get when educators link the social, emotional and academic together in consideration of the needs of the whole child.

**GPAD:** To what might we attribute the current interest in SEL in schools across the State?

**Dooley:** As a researcher, I think that I can point to a number of factors that may be contributing to the emphasis on SEL in our schools. A major, driving factor is that the cognitive and behavioral sciences have paid more attention to the role of emotions in learning over the last two decades. We've come a long way in understanding how powerful learning can be when emotions are tapped in productive ways. We are seeing research emerge in the learning sciences (that's a formal term for this area of research) as neuroscientists share insights about the brain that have

**Georgia Project AWARE Vision, Mission & Goals**

**What is Georgia Project AWARE?**

Georgia Project AWARE is a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) funded youth mental health initiative. AWARE stands for *Advancing Wellness and Resilience Education*.

**Vision**

School-aged youth in Georgia experience social and emotional wellness in educational settings through integrated systems of behavioral and mental health.

**Mission**

The mission of Project AWARE is to build and expand the capacity of school and community partnerships to coordinate and integrate systems of behavioral and mental health services for Georgia's school-aged youth.

**Goals**

- To increase awareness of mental health issues among school-aged youth.
- To provide training for school personnel and other adults who interact with school-aged youth to detect and respond to mental health issues in children and young adults
- To connect children, youth, and families who may have behavioral health issues with appropriate services.

**Georgia Project AWARE Team**

State Core Team: Rebecca Blanton, Project Director/Coordinator.

**LEAs**

Muscogee: GPA Manager/Coordinator (Vacant); Courtney Lamar, Mental Health Coordinator; Connie Smith, Administrative Assistant; Rhonda Patchin, Technical Assistant; and Michelle Pate, Technical Assistant.

Newton: Adrienne Boisson, Manager/Coordinator; Naran Houck-Butler, Mental Health Clinician; Cindy Leiva, Administrative Assistant.

Griffin- Spalding: Jason Byars, Manager/Coordinator; Debbie Crisp, Assistant Coordinator; Kelley Pettacio, Mental Health Clinician; and Rhonda Harris, Mental Health Clinician.

**Evaluation Team (Georgia State University):**

Drs. Joel Meyers, Kris Varjas & Ken Rice.

**State Training Team (Georgia State University Center for Leadership in Disability):**

Dr. Andy Roach, Dr. Emily Graybill, Dr. Catherine Perkins, Cirleen DeBlaere & Breanna Kell.

**Upcoming Project AWARE State Management Team Meetings – February 28, 2018 & May 9, 2018.**

The meetings begin at 10 a.m. and are held at Georgia Department of Education, Twin Tower West.

*Disclaimer: The views, policies, and opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Georgia Department of Education. Any mention of products or resources should not be viewed as an endorsement.*

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implications for learning from birth and beyond. Also, when we think about human development, the focus of development is about integrations across the physical, cognitive, language, and social-emotional domains. The truth is that, in order for real learning to occur, we have to keep our eyes on human development. Academics cannot be learned in isolation from the social and emotional. This we know solidly: All learning is social. In order for knowledge to endure, it must be bathed in emotions. That's a chemical reality in how the brain works.

**GPAD:** CASEL conducted a national survey of teachers on the topic of social-emotional learning in 2013 and found that many teachers see SEL as the *missing piece* in U.S. schools. Is that an opinion that you share?

**Dooley:** It could be possible that more students are demonstrating deficits in social and emotional skills, but teachers who are good at their craft have always engaged students socially and emotionally. However, those great teachers have not always been able to explain what they were doing that made a difference in students' learning. This is why I believe that, if we know that social-emotional learning is so critical to academic success, then we need to ensure that the training of teachers includes explicit instruction on the connection between learning and emotions.

**GPAD:** What is one of the most compelling considerations when implementing SEL practices in schools and classrooms?

**Dooley:** At the heart of effective teaching is engagement of the learner, which includes building trusting relationships that serve as the foundation of the teaching-learning exchange. Engagement of the learner should be

## ABOUT CAITLIN DOOLEY, PH.D.

Caitlin McMunn Dooley, Ph.D. is Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning for the Georgia Department of Education. In this role, she leads teams for Curriculum and Instruction, Teacher and Leader Support and Development, and Georgia Virtual. Since her start at the Georgia Department of Education, her team has been awarded over \$66M in competitive grants to improve student learning. Furthermore, under Dr. Dooley's leadership, Georgia continues to experience growth in student achievement and now has over 50 districts participating in community coalitions to improve overall childhood outcomes. Dr. Dooley has worked as a preschool and elementary classroom teacher, teacher educator, educational researcher, and professor at Georgia State University. Since earning degrees from the University of Virginia and the University of Texas, Dr. Dooley has authored over 50 publications and led and evaluated funded research projects totaling over \$20M to investigate children's literacy learning and instruction, digital literacies, teacher learning, and education policy. Dr. Dooley was a writer for the National Computer Science Education Frameworks and has been the principal investigator for several projects funded by the National Science Foundation for computer science education and learning technologies. She has served on several Boards, including the National Council of Teachers of English, Literacy Research Association, Georgia's Brain Trust for Babies, the Get Georgia Reading Campaign Cabinet, and Decatur Makers.

a major consideration in any school's implementation of SEL practices. My observation is that the overwhelming majority of administrators and teachers began careers in the education profession because they care about students. Caring may look different from educator to educator, based on cultural influences. For example, some teachers are "warm demanders" in terms of their approach to student engagement. This may look like they're demanding to outsiders, but they care deeply for their students and their students know. If learners perceive that the care and emotional engagement of their teachers are acceptable, then the variability from one educator to another is probably not an issue. Nevertheless, some teachers may need support for developing competence in emotional engagement.

**GPAD:** How is the Georgia Department of Education promoting social-emotional learning in schools?

**Dooley:** Our State School Superintendent and the Governor want us to move to a more personalized approach to learning. We are in the process of developing the approach with district and higher education partners who have already begun walking this path. Our state standards include practices, knowledge and skills that support SEL. Many SEL competences are already embedded, but need to be made more explicit. A personalized approach to learning will naturally focus on the social and emotional aspects of learning. The Department has thoughtfully developed a number of initiatives that promote SEL as described in this issue of *GPAD* (see p. 4).

**GPAD:** You mentioned that GaDOE staff is in the process of developing an approach to personalized learning. Can you give us a peek at what has been conceptualized so far?

**Dooley:** Like I said, we are in the very early stages of the work on personalized learning. We are moving from the bottom up as we look at the state standards to determine the explicit knowledge that educators need in order to personalize our students' learning. Because we are all in this work for students, we have placed the learner at the center. We want to use personalized learning to point the learner toward a pathway that helps him become the best person possible. We anticipate developing a computer-readable, personalized learning taxonomy that teachers will be able to access in support of student engagement. The taxonomy will not introduce anything new, but will be used to deepen teachers' explicit knowledge and understanding of how the standards and personalized learning are connected.

**GPAD:** Is there anything in the State's ESSA [Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015] Plan that promotes implementation of SEL at the local level?

**Dooley:** As you are no doubt aware, Georgia's ESSA Plan is mandated by Congress, and replaces our previous plan that was approved under the federal No Child Left Behind Act many years ago. Georgia's ESSA Plan was developed over a period of more than a year and a half through extensive engagement of stakeholders serving on working committees. Our staff used an open process and listened deeply to the many ideas received. The whole child has been placed at the center of the state's Continuous School Improvement process wheel. SEL shows up right there with the focus on the whole child. We are asking school districts to evaluate schoolwide needs in conjunction with the holistic needs of students. Using the results

of their needs assessments, district and school leaders are requested to choose at least one priority relating to the whole child. This could actually include a focus on SEL-related activities.

**GPAD:** You alluded to this earlier, but I would like to return to the topic of Georgia Performance Standards. How do the standards specifically address social-emotional learning?

**Dooley:** Social-emotional learning is already baked into the standards as part of the disciplinary practices. For example, in ELA and Art, there is a standard that speaks to “developing a personal voice,” which relates to self-awareness. Another example is the emphasis on “problem-solving,” which runs through nearly every subject, but especially Mathematics and the Sciences. It may be that we can make the SEL connection more explicit, but our performance standards are definitely infused with the social and emotional aspects of learning.

**GPAD:** Considering DECAL’s (the Department of Early Care and Learning) standards include an emphasis on social-emotional learning for children birth to five years of age, do you foresee an opportunity to build upon those standards for the K-12 student population?

**Dooley:** The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning has created very explicit social-emotional competencies as part of its Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS). I don’t foresee that GaDOE will be introducing new SEL standards. However, we are more likely to articulate the Georgia Performance Standards to the GELDS competencies at some point.

**GPAD:** What types of SEL practices and programs would you expect to see in classrooms?

**Dooley:** What I would want to see is our teachers demonstrating that they are fully present by listening to and looking at students during instructional exchanges. That is, a type of mindful attention to the present offers students assurance that they matter and their interactions matter. I would expect to see active social and emotional engagement of students in the learning - back and forth feedback and responses. Of course, there would be a respectful, caring classroom climate.

**GPAD:** Where does social-emotional learning fit into the Department’s Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework?

**Dooley:** SEL should definitely be included in Tier 1 (focus on all students in classroom settings) of the PBIS framework, and progressively more in subsequent tiers as students demonstrate more intensive need for social, emotional or behavioral supports and interventions. Let me just add that

PBIS is a framework, not a program. All educators need to agree that this is the case. We are working on aligning the tiers of the early learning program-wide PBIS pyramid with the K-12 PBIS tiers. The State PBIS Team is also trying to identify the flexibility that should exist in the norms from one school district to the next.

**GPAD:** Georgia Project AWARE was funded to advance wellness and resilience in education through a focus on children’s mental health. Does a focus on social and emotional learning actually advance children’s mental health, and vice versa? In other words, how do you see these two emphases working together?

**Dooley:** I see social and emotional learning and mental health as two sides of the same coin. Social and emotional well-being should lead to

mental wellness and the development of the soft social skills that are part of being a good worker and community member. I think that the issue to be addressed is how to eliminate the social stigma associated with having a mental health problem. The stigma does not have to exist. It may be that helping students to become socially and emotionally competent will decrease the odds of them having mental health problems.

**GPAD:** College & Career Ready, School Climate Ratings, PBIS, Children’s Mental Health, Safe and Drug Free Schools, Character Education, and the list goes on. These are some of the key initiatives that Georgia’s schools are implementing to increase student achievement in safe, child-friendly environments. How do all of these fit

together to produce socially and emotionally resilient children at the end of their school careers? Is there a single initiative on this list that has the effect of being the linchpin for overall student wellness?

**Dooley:** What pulls all of these initiatives together is the child. We have pushed the needle on academics in Georgia and have seen some incredible growth outcomes over the last ten years. What we often hear from community partners and businesses is that our students need “soft skills” as well. As I hope I have demonstrated in my responses, we at GaDOE are working to thread the needle around all of our initiatives to ensure that we are educating the whole child in more personalized ways.

**GPAD:** Under Georgia’s newly-awarded competitive Striving Readers’ grant it appears that there will be opportunities for professional development relating to social and emotional learning. Tell us what you envision in the way of professional development.

**Dooley:** We are so excited about this competitive grant award from the U.S. Department of Education! It was developed based on lessons learned through Georgia’s previous Striving Readers grant (2011-2016) and the *Get Georgia Reading Campaign*. Georgia’s grant application received

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\$61,579,800, the highest awarded amount in the nation. The goal of the grant, called *Literacy for Learning, Living and Leading Georgia (L4GA)*, is to improve student literacy learning, teacher delivery of instruction, school climate and culture, and academic outcomes across all subgroups of children, from birth to grade 12. There is a professional development component, and GaDOE will be able to provide training on a variety of topics, based on identified need, including SEL where appropriate.

**GPAD:** There are some who may see the emphasis on SEL as another “band wagon” that will further burden classroom teachers with extra work and eventually go by the wayside. What does your crystal ball say about the place that SEL will eventually occupy in Georgia classrooms?

**Dooley:** SEL is the essence of learning and its focus is on attributes that make learners successful in school and life. Like personalized learning, SEL is a fad that we want to make a formidable trend in Georgia’s Schools. This will occur over time. It may even be called something else as we conceptualize personalized learning and explore holistic strategies to educate the whole child. Nevertheless, the emphasis on SEL won’t be going away because it’s simply part of how humans develop.

### A MESSAGE FROM GEORGIA’S PROJECT AWARE DIRECTOR

## SEL-Paramount to Academic Success

By Rebecca Blanton, MS

The primary theme of this issue of *GPAD* is Social-Emotional Learning, or SEL. As a former principal, I observed firsthand that social and emotional skills are paramount to a student’s academic success. Students must be able to self-regulate before engaging in meaningful academic learning. When students became dysregulated, they simply were not available to learn. It was the job of teachers, parents and administrators to help students regulate, not simply behave. Teaching students how to self-regulate was one of the keys to their academic success.



Rebecca Blanton

In compiling this issue we have learned that we could have included hundreds of schools’ and districts’ SEL stories. Educators’ efforts to link the social and emotional with the academic appear to be widespread as GaDOE promotes a systemic focus on whole child education. We are indebted to Dr. Caitlin Dooley, GaDOE Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, for agreeing to a featured interview and assisting us in identifying schools and districts that are plotting their own courses in the implementation of SEL practices. The Atlanta Public Schools (APS), one of ten school districts in the U.S. selected by CASEL to participate in a longitudinal study on SEL, describes where they are in their roll-out across the district’s 76 schools. In discovering Forsyth County School System’s approach to SEL, we found that they have made their *Learner Profile* the centerpiece of their social, emotional and academic pursuits. A copy of the Forsyth County Learner Profile has been included, with their permission,

as an example of one school system’s SEL integration efforts. Our Project AWARE LEAs continue to share their successes in getting individual schools onboard in the implementation of multi-tiered social, emotional and behavioral supports and interventions. Thanks to Arianne Weldon, Director of the Get Georgia Reading Campaign, our readers are reminded of the important work of this partnership. Arianne also briefs us on the co-existence of language deficits and mental health problems among many students who do not achieve grade level reading proficiency. Finally, be sure to read contributions from our state partners, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning and Georgia State University Center for Leadership in Disability.

## Georgia Department of Education Promotes SEL Through Major Initiatives

### **Literacy for Learning, Living, and Leading in Georgia (L4GA) is Georgia’s newly awarded competitive Striving Readers grant.**

Ninety-five percent of this \$61.5M grant will be sub-awarded to district partnerships. Included in the possible professional development options will be social and emotional learning, especially as it relates to engagement for learning. This grant-funded initiative was designed to merge lessons learned from the Get Georgia Reading Campaign and the previous Striving Readers grant-funded project. It will support community coalitions that work with schools in a feeder pattern, including a preschool/early learning, elementary, middle, and high school, so that children’s social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development are supported. <http://l4ga.gadoe.org>

### **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based, data-driven framework proven to reduce disciplinary incidents, increase a school’s sense of safety and support improved academic outcomes.**

More than 24,500 U.S. schools are implementing PBIS and saving countless instructional hours otherwise lost to discipline. The premise of PBIS is that continual teaching, combined with acknowledgement or feedback of positive student behavior will reduce unnecessary discipline and promote a climate of greater productivity, safety and learning. PBIS schools apply a multi-tiered approach to prevention, using disciplinary data and principles of behavior analysis to develop school-wide, targeted and individualized interventions and supports to improve school climate for all students. (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports). <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/Positive-Behavioral-Interventions-and-Support.aspx>

**Now Is The Time (NITT):** Project AWARE (*Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education*) is a 5 year federal grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency (SAMHSA) that was awarded to the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) in September 2014. The purpose of Georgia Project AWARE is to increase awareness of mental

health issues among school-aged youth; provide training in Youth Mental Health First Aid; and connect children, youth, and families who may have behavioral health issues with appropriate services. (SAMHSA, Center for Mental Health Services, 2015).

**The GaDOE is partnering with Muscogee County, Newton County and Griffin-Spalding Schools to provide training in Youth Mental Health First Aid and to develop processes and procedures for connecting youth and families to community based mental health**

### CASEL'S DEFINITION OF SEL AND CORE COMPETENCIES

*Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.*

Source: <http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel/>

## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) COMPETENCIES

### SELF-AWARENESS

The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."

- ⇒ IDENTIFYING EMOTIONS
- ⇒ ACCURATE SELF-PERCEPTION
- ⇒ RECOGNIZING STRENGTHS
- ⇒ SELF-CONFIDENCE
- ⇒ SELF-EFFICACY

### SOCIAL AWARENESS

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

- ⇒ PERSPECTIVE-TAKING
- ⇒ EMPATHY
- ⇒ APPRECIATING DIVERSITY
- ⇒ RESPECT FOR OTHERS

### RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

- ⇒ IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS
- ⇒ ANALYZING SITUATIONS
- ⇒ SOLVING PROBLEMS
- ⇒ EVALUATING
- ⇒ REFLECTING
- ⇒ ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

### SELF-MANAGEMENT

The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

- ⇒ IMPULSE CONTROL
- ⇒ STRESS MANAGEMENT
- ⇒ SELF-DISCIPLINE
- ⇒ SELF-MOTIVATION
- ⇒ GOAL SETTING
- ⇒ ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

### RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

- ⇒ COMMUNICATION
- ⇒ SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT
- ⇒ RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
- ⇒ TEAMWORK



**services.** Georgia State University (Center for Leadership in Disability and the Center for Research on School Safety, School Climate and Classroom Management) is providing training and evaluation for Georgia Project AWARE. <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/Georgia-Project-AWARE.aspx>  
**State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)** - This recently funded competitive grant was awarded to GaDOE to increase awareness, knowledge, and implementation of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). The MTSS framework provides educators with a way to

systematically examine and improve student behaviors and academic learning. The previous SPDG grants have focused largely on special education populations. The current grant will be more generalized for all educators and school leaders to take responsibility for all students' learning by offering tiered levels of engagement and intervention. <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/State-Personnel-Development-Grant.aspx>; also <http://www.gaspdg.org/>

## National Survey Finds Principals Support SEL

The recently-released CASEL report, *Ready to Lead* (J.L. DePaoli, M.N. Atwell and J. Bridgeland, 2017), outlines findings from a national principals' survey on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). The survey included a representative sample of 884 Pre-K to 12 public school principals and interviews with 16 superintendents and 10 district-level research and evaluation specialists representing diverse school districts and with varying levels of experience in implementing SEL programming. Findings from the national principal survey are presented in four major areas: (1) Attitudes about SEL, (2) SEL Implementation, (3) The path to increased SEL, and (4) Assessing SEL. Key findings include:

### Attitudes About SEL

- Principals understand, value, and are committed to developing SEL skills
- Principals believe SEL should be taught to all students
- Principals believe in SEL's benefits, but are less convinced of its impact on academic achievement
- Principals believe SEL can positively affect students' in-school experience

### SEL Implementation

- Support for SEL is high, but implementation varies greatly
- Few schools fully meet SEL implementation benchmarks developed by CASEL
- District leadership plays a large role in driving SEL
- Schools that are systematically implementing SEL involve more people, see more success

### Path to Increased SEL

- Principals want more SEL training for teachers, access to research-based strategies
- High implementers of SEL are more likely to report better trained teachers
- Lack of time, funding also seen as barriers

### Assessing SEL

- Most principals believe SEL skills can be accurately measured and assessed
- Few administrators are familiar with current SEL assessments, understand what measures count in assessing SEL
- Few principals are assessing all students' SEL development
- More useful assessments, greater training in using SEL data needed
- Principals see many uses for SEL data; hold mixed views on SEL accountability
- Principals support inclusion of SEL in state education standards

The *Ready to Lead SEL* report can be found here: [http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ReadyToLead\\_ES\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ReadyToLead_ES_FINAL.pdf).

## SOME FAST FACTS ABOUT SEL

- Nine out of ten teachers believe social and emotional skills can be taught and that it benefits students (J. Bridgeland, M. Bruce & A. Hariharan, 2013).
- Integrating social and emotional development with academic learning returns \$11 for every \$1 invested (K. Heckman, et al., 2014).
- Social and emotional competency is more predictive of academic and career achievement than IQ (M. Almlund, et al., 2011).
- Eight in ten employers say social and emotional skills are the most important to success and yet are also the hardest skills to find (W. Cunningham & P. Villasenor, 2016).
- Attention to social and emotional development is not only valuable in early childhood. Sustaining a focus on social and emotional growth through adolescence is crucial for improving achievement and outcomes beyond school (J.J. Heckman, 2008).
- After paying for college, the next biggest concern among parents is their children's social and emotional well-being (Learning Heroes, 2016).

Source: *Social, Emotional, and Academic Development: Fast Facts*. Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development. Retrieved at: [www.AspenSEAD.org](http://www.AspenSEAD.org)

## LEARNER PROFILE AND SEL

### Forsyth County Learner Profile Informs Staff's and Stakeholders' Work on SEL

By Debbie Smith

Director of Student Support Services

#### SEL Focus Integral to Meeting Goals of Learner Profile, Whole Child Emphasis

The mission of the Forsyth County School System is to prepare all learners to lead and succeed. Our Superintendent, Dr. Jeffrey Bearden, is leading the charge for preparing the "whole child" to be successful throughout school and life. The District's Learner Profile is our strategic compass and helps us keep our end in mind. It informs the work of administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents and stakeholders. The Learner Profile, which evolved from our previous Graduate Profile to an all-grades emphasis, lists the attributes we expect all students to possess by the time they graduate from one of our high schools. It is displayed in every classroom in the district. Our 2017-2022 Strategic Plan includes a learning and growth goal that encompasses performance objectives relating to increasing achievement and fostering social and emotional growth for all students.



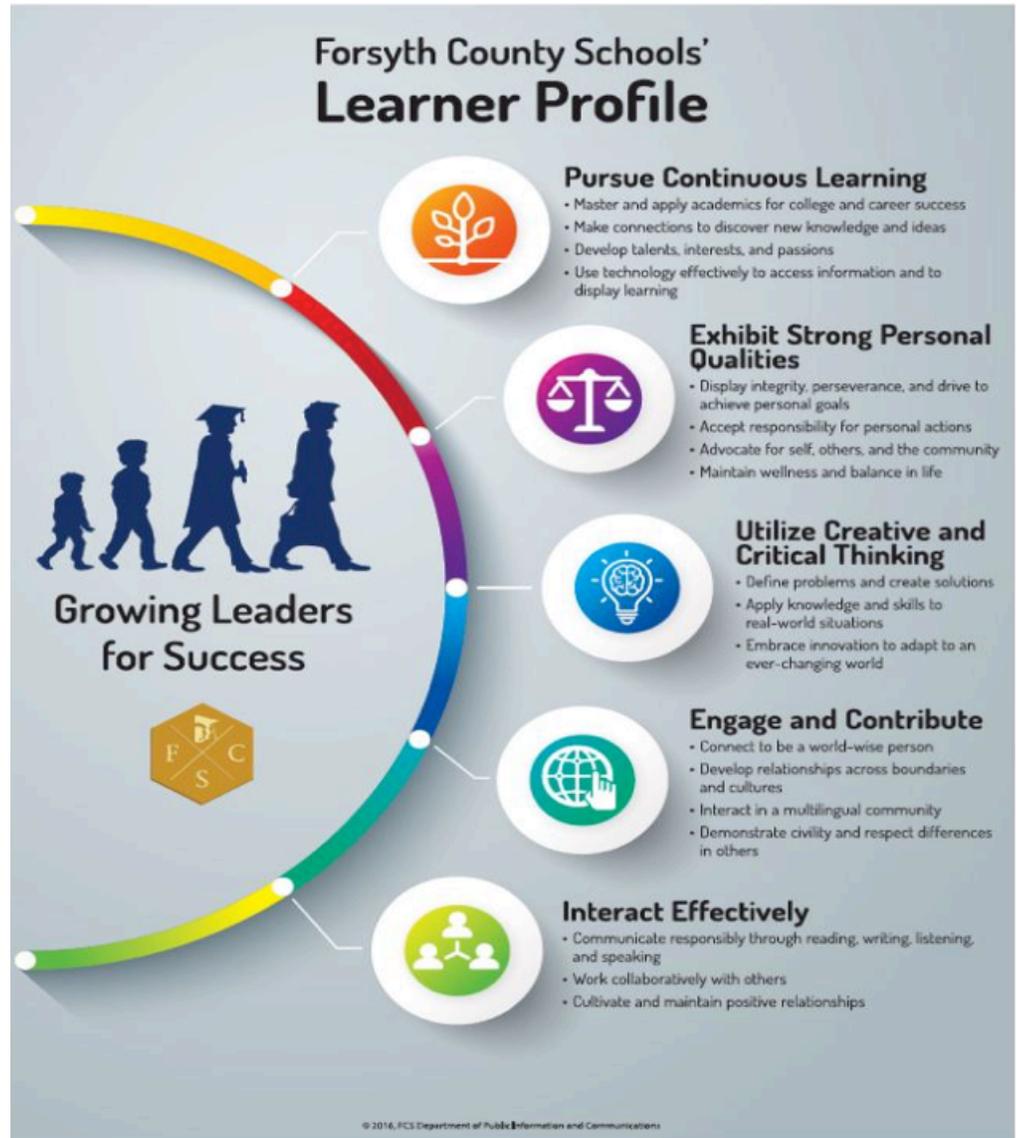
Debbie Smith

At the district level, our Human Resources, Safety, Special Education, Student Support Services, Teaching and Learning, and Technology Departments are working collaboratively with schools and community members to increase academic achievement and implementation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in all classrooms. Foundational skills are being built through a variety of programs and learning strategies aligned with the SEL Competencies of Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Responsible Decision-Making, and Relationship Skills. A close examination of the attributes listed in the Learner Profile shows that many are tied to the social, emotional, and personal skills that employers often identify as critical to vocational success (*See copy of Forsyth County Learner Profile in sidebar on this page*). Research clearly shows an 11% increase in academic achievement, and an \$11 return for every \$1 invested in SEL implementation.

Recent data from the Georgia Student Health Survey highlights areas of concern within our district related to increasing amounts of stress, anxiety, suicidal ideation, substance abuse, and mental health issues among our student population. Clearly, this is not an isolated problem in Forsyth County nor the State of Georgia, but a growing epidemic throughout our nation. We also understand that these issues are complex and must be addressed in a variety of ways. While we can certainly provide education about the dangers of substance abuse and educate students on suicide prevention, mental wellness techniques, and crisis intervention programs, we must also be proactive and instill the affective skills that will help them cope with and conquer these issues as they grow into adulthood. We are committed to providing the resources and learning opportunities necessary to afford our students every opportunity for success. Indeed, it is our moral imperative.

### **SEL Committee Plots Course, Connects Initiatives**

Our journey began two years ago with the formation of a SEL subcommittee made up of passionate and committed school and district leaders across our system. The SEL team began researching national and international data and brainstorming ideas related to implementation of SEL district-wide. For the 2017-18 school year, we are focusing on training all school and district leaders about the importance and the imperative of embracing social and emotional learning. From this training and the conversations among leaders, it has been decided to focus our first year on providing SEL training for our teachers, and building school cultures that



*Used by permission of Forsyth County School System, November 2017.*

not only embrace SEL but model it, for students and all stakeholders. SEL is embraced throughout our school system and is a multifaceted approach. This journey has led to a number of initiatives that align with and support SEL, which we believe are vital for our students, our families, and our community.

### *Mentor Program*

Forsyth County Schools Mentor Program utilizes adult, student, and teacher mentors to meet with students for thirty minutes per week for the duration of the school year. Forsyth County Schools' mentors play an important role in producing social and emotional growth in young people that improve relationships with parents, peers, and others while improving students' overall well-being. Mentors work with students on social and emotional skills, communication skills and interpersonal skills to prepare them for success, serve as an essential role model, and develop positive relationships for many of Forsyth County Schools students.

### Prevention Services

Through the work of Preventions Services, our counseling team, and our social work team, and with the help and support of our community Partners in Education, Forsyth County Schools (FCS) will implement two new programs this year, Signs of Suicide in middle and high school, and Sources of Strength in high school. These programs will educate students, parents, and educators about suicide prevention. Our Suicide Prevention Team continues to research educational resources for our schools, as well as resources to support our families. FCS is an active member of our Forsyth County Drug Awareness Council and the United Way Mental Health Committee. We continue to work with these teams to ensure we are communicating and educating our community on substance use issues. As an outreach of this work, all school nurses have been trained in the use of Naloxone to treat any person(s) who may be suffering from an opioid overdose. Naloxone is provided to all of our school clinics through funding from our Forsyth County Sheriff's Department, with training provided by Children's Healthcare of Atlanta.

### Interagency Collaboration & District Level Mental Health Support

Our social workers continue to work with our law enforcement officials, judicial system, and community health care professionals to address the needs of our students and our Forsyth County families. For the first time, we have been able to designate one of our social workers, trained in mental health procedures and practices, to work as our Mental Health Services Coordinator. It will be the goal of this coordinator to support school leaders, teachers, counselors, and families in dealing with mental health concerns, and begin building a strong mental health program that addresses the needs of our students K-12. In addition, we are training several of our counselors and social workers to provide mindfulness and movement strategies to aid students in dealing with emotional stress and developing strategies to bring calmness to their body and mind.

### School-based Training on District's Multi-tiered System of Supports

This school year, as part of Forsyth's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), all elementary and middle schools received training to implement "Stop and Think" as a Tier 3 intervention to improve students' social and behavioral skills. School psychologists are an integral part of helping schools identify and implement effective research-based intervention supports at Tiers 2 and 3. They are involved in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Data Teams, and Student Support Teams (SST) to assist school staff when gathering and analyzing student data to determine response to intervention. Additionally, our Safety Department, headed by our Chief Operations Officer, is providing training for eight of our schools (elementary, middle, and high) on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. Our goal is to train all schools over the next few years, so that PBIS is district-wide.

### Formation of Total Wellness Collaborative Team

Finally, our district's SEL work has led to the formation of our *Total Wellness Collaborative* team made up of leaders, teachers, and community members. The purpose of this team is to continue to develop and explore ways of ensuring the successful growth of the "whole child." As such, we are committed to helping learners meet the goals and attributes of our Learner Profile. To achieve this, a school-community partnership is essential in

helping develop a comprehensive strategic plan considering health in these areas: intellectual, physical, emotional, social, and environmental.

Please check [www.forsyth.k12.ga.us/sss](http://www.forsyth.k12.ga.us/sss) as we continue to update and provide information to educate and support our students, teachers, and parents.

## SUCCESSES WITH PBIS AND SEL

# Project AWARE Muscogee Celebrates On-boarding of 4th Cohort of PBIS Schools and Successes with SEL

By Courtney Lamar, MS, NCC, BCC  
School Mental Health Coordinator

Now in the fourth year of implementing a federal children's mental health grant, Project AWARE Muscogee is approaching its final stretch. Under the leadership of Tammi Clarke, Director of Muscogee County School District's PBIS Program and Project AWARE, one of the primary focuses has been on guiding the building-level process and implementation of the Georgia PBIS framework. Recently Ms. Clarke was appointed to a position of PBIS Program Specialist at the Georgia Department of Education, leaving evidence that her commitment and hard work are paying-off in MCSD. Today, 38 out of 57 of our schools are practicing PBIS — the 4th cohort having been trained in October 2017. That's a reason to celebrate! As can be seen in the graphic below, between school years 2015 and 2017, the number of MSCD schools utilizing the PBIS framework at some level increased from 11 to 38. Moreover, the number of schools determined to be at the emerging (gray) and operational (orange) stages of PBIS implementation has shown a steady uptick.



From the onset of the grant, Project AWARE Muscogee staff has sought to establish programs and practices relating to children's mental health that naturally integrate into the PBIS framework. A key linkage has been made by providing a range of social, emotional and behavioral supports, including ones that focus on prevention and intervention for school personnel and students. For example, Project AWARE staff provides monthly professional development on *Youth Mental Health First Aid*

and *Managing Challenging Behaviors* for school administrators, educators and counselors. Project AWARE also continues to offer free training on *Youth Mental Health First Aid* to the community. Some of the foundational social, emotional and behavioral supports provided directly to students include: *Check-In Check-Out*, *Sources of Strength*, *Kids on the Block*, and *Second Step*. The word around MCSD is that numerous schools are experiencing positive results with students as it relates to use of these types of supports. Following are some testimonials from selected MCSD administrators, educators and counselors that underscore perceptions of success in improving students' social, emotional and behavioral skills.

### Hardaway High School

"Sources of Strength (SOS) was introduced to Hardaway High School (HHS) February 2016 through Project AWARE. The primary purpose of this program is to spread Hope, Help, and Strength. Designed as a suicide prevention program, SOS takes on various roles to help students through life events, such as bullying and sharing social issues. Trained peer leaders at Hardaway help students, faculty, and staff identify their own behavioral needs and reach their peers in and out of the classroom using social media, messages, and positive networking. Peer leaders use positive message campaigns as a medium to reach the student body. During the holiday season, Hardaway Peer leaders established a school-wide Thankfulness Challenge campaign. HHS Students named three things they are thankful for this season. Students, teachers, staff, and parents have all been participating in the campaign. I am pleased to say it has been a total success!"

— James A. Murphy Head Guidance Counselor Hardaway High School



### Double Churches Middle School

"For the last three years, we have been using Second Step and Sources of Strength. Since I am at a middle school, I believe that these tools are fundamental to students' emotional and social wellbeing. The transition to middle school can be tough on some students and overall, the navigation of social circles during these years is trying at times. The Second Step curriculum provides all students in our school the chance to discuss their feelings and emotions with each other and work on important social skills. This helps them to see their peers in a different light and to not feel so "alone." Students report really enjoying being in Sources of Strength and are always asking about their next meeting or campaign! I have noticed an increase in reporting students who self-harm or make suicidal comments since this program began."

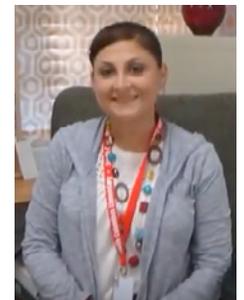
— Amber Newton, Ed.S Professional School Counselor  
Double Churches Middle School



### South Columbus Elementary

"I can personally see a difference in my students with the use of the Second Step Program. Students need to thrive in classroom and in life. With the opportunity to learn the techniques provided, this program enables students to have positive steps in social learning. The program has helped my students set goals, gain confidence, make better decisions and collaborate more with peers. The activities are enriched with real life scenarios and the videos allow the students to connect with students of their age group. The students continue to grow and build off each activity presented. They are able to use the information to fit their needs and then, in turn, become more thoughtful and productive."

— Christina Chartier, 4th grade Literacy Teacher  
South Columbus Elementary Schools



### ABOUT SECOND STEP SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAM

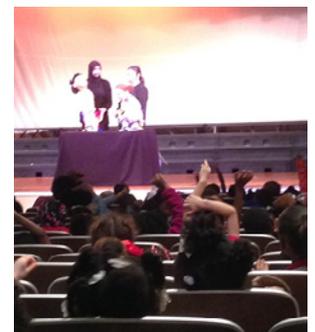
Second Step is an evidence-based Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Program designed for social-emotional skills instruction of students in early learning – grade eight. The program includes classroom materials such as activity guides and teaching aids and resources. Students learn school and life skills through engaging, age-appropriate games, songs, activities and media. Age-appropriate instruction helps students to develop skills such as: making friends, managing emotions, making decisions, solving problems, solving conflicts, dealing with peer pressure, helping others, and many more. Families get involved through take-home activities, family letters, parent night activities, etc. On-line resources are available to help teachers plan lessons, train staff, and communicate with families. The program is available in stand-alone versions for early learning, elementary, and middle school levels.

For more information about Second Steps access: <http://www.secondstep.org/>

### Wynnton Arts Academy

"Kids-on-the-Block puppet shows present a creative and entertaining way to reinforce social emotional learning for our elementary students. They can learn positive, proactive strategies for solving problems. I especially like how the puppeteers make their presentation relevant by incorporating the 4 Cs from our PBIS school-wide plan. This makes the content more meaningful for our students. Students do quick-writes in the classrooms after the performances to brainstorm what they learned. After our second puppet show this week, a third grader had this to say in her reflection, "If someone is getting bullied, help them and walk away from the bully." A fifth grader wrote, "As you can see this program helped me and my friends a lot. So Mrs. Mull please invite them back to do another very meaningful presentation."

— Carolyn G. Mull, Principal, Wynnton Arts Academy, Columbus, GA



## HEARTS AND SMARTS

# APS SEL Program: Developing the Hearts and Smarts of Atlanta's Children

By Rose Prejean, PhD,  
APS SEL Team Director

## SEL –APS Superintendent's Imperative

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Research has found that students who participate in SEL programming make gains in multiple areas including pro-social behavior, attitudes about themselves and others, standardized achievement scores and social emotional skills. These same students also showed a reduction in problem behaviors and emotional distress (*Child Development, 82 (1), 405-432*).



Although a comprehensive focus on SEL is new to Atlanta Public Schools (APS), Superintendent Carstarphen has been committed to SEL and supportive of meeting the needs of the whole child for many years. After the successful execution of a SEL program in her previous district, Dr. Carstarphen brought to APS a focus on systematically supporting the hearts and smarts of Atlanta's children. Here's what Dr. Carstarphen says about the importance of our students learning social-emotional skills:

*"Many of our students come to us without the social-emotional skills they need to become productive adults in a world that is increasingly becoming smaller and flatter. Since the skills can be taught, I feel it is imperative that we as educators do more to teach self-management, relationship building, cooperation, and conflict resolution."*

— Meria Joel Carstarphen, EdD, Superintendent, Atlanta Public Schools  
As quoted on the Second Step Program website: <http://www.secondstep.org/second-step-suite>

In an effort to move forward in meeting Dr. Carstarphen's *imperative* of teaching our students core social and emotional skills that will help them to become productive adults, APS created a SEL Vision. The vision speaks to the key elements that serve as the cornerstone of APS' comprehensive SEL Program:

- Common Standards and Culture
- Universal Screening in Key Grades
- Core Curriculum Beginning in Pre-K

- Teacher Professional Development
- Family/Home Connection
- Fidelity and Sustainability through Coaching Support
- Special Education Enhanced SEL Programming

Additionally, APS organized a Districtwide Social Emotional Learning Team (APS District SEL Team) to provide professional development, coaching, and technical support to schools as they systematically organize and reorganize their classroom climates, practices, and policies to embrace and promote the elements of the District's SEL Vision. The emphasis on social-emotional learning was not to come at the sacrifice of academic learning, but was to be viewed and taught with the same sense of urgency. Further, to ensure connectedness to school improvement, SEL was integrated into APS' Turnaround Plan in 2015. The decision was also made to place SEL, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Restorative Practices under one SEL umbrella by school year 2017 as a strategic mechanism for improving the culture and climate of APS schools.

APS was awarded a Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) grant in 2015. The focus of the grant is to help the district increase its understanding of SEL and develop strategies for embedding SEL deeply into district practices, including an alignment with teaching and learning. As a recipient of the grant, APS became one of 10 districts participating in CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI). This has given APS access to CASEL's treasure trove of human and material resources, including evidence-based practices.

## The APS SEL Team

The APS SEL Team is composed of one district level SEL Director (Rose Prejean), three SEL Coordinators (Veneschia Bryant, Tara Shelton, and Lindsay Wyczalkowski) and two SEL Coaches (Clara Totenberg Green and Erick Metzger). This diverse group of educators includes individuals who have served as administrators and general and special educators. Two are graduates of APS and three were Teachers of the Year during their tenures as classroom teachers. All are strong advocates of whole child education and actively promote social emotional learning on APS' SEL Twitter account. They all subscribe to James Comer's belief that "no significant learning can occur without a significant relationship."

## Making it Happen in School Clusters

To jumpstart the implementation process, it was determined that each school would establish a School SEL Team. SEL teams were requested to work in collaboration with the APS District SEL Team to ensure social emotional learning is woven throughout students' daily experiences. During the 2015-2016 school year, schools in the Carver Cluster, the South Atlanta Cluster and all middle schools embedded SEL into their academic day and their school culture through community gatherings, establishing essential agreements, professional development (Teacher Language, SEL 101, Setting up the SEL Classroom, Mindfulness), and direct weekly SEL coaching support. Elementary and middle schools in these clusters implemented the Second Step curriculum in all homerooms or advisory groups.

The Harper Archer Middle School Mentoring program was also awarded a NoVo SEL Innovation Fund grant in 2016. The mentoring program is part of the school's overall SEL Program, which is committed to improving the total health and wellness of students at Harper Archer Middle School. Helping disadvantaged youth reach their full potential is a key component that threads through the mentoring and SEL programs. Once youth mentees have mastered the objectives of the Harper Archer SEL program they become student SEL leaders in the school. As SEL leaders, they mentor pre-identified sixth and seventh grade students. The NoVo SEL Innovation Fund grant provides opportunities for students to participate in a series of classes, workshops and field trips that help them use their social emotional skills in real world settings. If interested in learning more about the NoVo SEL Innovation Fund see <https://novofoundation.org>.

During the 2016-2017 school year, SEL implementation expanded to incorporate schools in additional clusters, including: Douglass, Grady, Jackson, Mays, Therrell, Washington, Crim, West End, Forrest Hills, North Atlanta High School and Jackson Elementary. Consistent with the District's SEL roll-out plan, the final school clusters will be implementing SEL during school year 2017-2018. The Second Step curriculum is continuing to be implemented in all SEL elementary and middle schools. All high schools continue to implement School Connect, a SEL explicit curriculum, during advisory.

### Results & Lessons Learned – So Far

The overall performance of students at our SEL schools has been measured using the Georgia College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) academic and school climate results, attendance and discipline rates, and the Georgia School Health Survey for the 2016-2017 school year. An analysis of these data reveals:

- Academics – 57 schools achieved gains across all subjects.
- Discipline Referrals – most schools saw a decrease in the number of out of school suspensions.
- School Health Survey – revealed that we still have work to do, but students have a more positive outlook on their school environments.

Lessons Learned include:

- Having leadership at the very top championing the districtwide implementation of SEL signals to all stakeholders that our students' social and emotional wellbeing is equally as important as their cognitive and intellectual development. Superintendent Carstarphen visits our SEL schools often and blogs about what she sees emerging. She also spends many hours with students listening to them and developing relationships.
- Developing the hearts and smarts of Atlanta's students is possible when teachers are provided on-going professional development and technical support to install personal attitudes, practices and classroom climates that are compatible with social-emotional development of their students. We are very excited about how teachers in APS are responding to the implementation of SEL programming at all grade levels. For example, schools are implementing Kindness Clubs and peace corners. Teachers and students continue to grow in their own self-awareness and are making more responsible choices by building relationships within the school community. In addition, district staff

and leaders are also participating in SEL trainings and development. As APS continues to grow in understanding the five competencies of SEL, the district is changing the culture of schools and practices within the system.

For further information on APS' SEL activities and practices, contact Dr. Prejean at [Rose.Prejean@atlanta.k12.ga.us](mailto:Rose.Prejean@atlanta.k12.ga.us).

### WHAT AFFECTS THE ABILITY TO LEARN TO READ?

## Language Development, Children's Mental Health, and Learning to Read

By Arianne Weldon, MPH  
*Director, Get Georgia Reading Campaign*



### Why a Public-Private Partnership to Improve Reading by Third Grade

We are at a critical point in time when it comes to preparing Georgia's next generation of leaders. Why? Because nearly two-thirds of Georgia's children are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade (Georgia Milestones Assessment, English Language Arts, 2017). This affects our economy, our safety, and our health. When compared to children who are strong readers, children who cannot read proficiently by the end of third grade, are more likely to experience an array of issues, including:

- Poor health
- Discipline problems
- Poor performance in eighth-grade math
- Teen pregnancy
- Dropout of high school

As adults, they are more likely to spend time in prison, struggle with unemployment, and even face shorter life expectancies.

In 2013, Georgia's public and private leaders came together to take on third grade reading—not only as an education issue—but as an urgent priority for all who care about children's health and well-being. Together, they formed the Get Georgia Reading Campaign and developed a common agenda as a shared framework for action at both the state and community level.

The common agenda consists of four research-based pillars—Language Nutrition, Access, Positive Learning Climate, and Teacher Preparation and Effectiveness. Together, these pillars define the conditions essential for all children to be on a path—starting from birth—to reading proficiently by the end of third grade. They also provide a shared language and understanding as a basis for challenging conventional approaches, establishing new partnerships, and aligning actions to achieve measurable results. Following is a brief description of each pillar:

- Language Nutrition: All children receive abundant, language-rich,

adult-child interactions, which are as critical for brain development as healthy food is for physical growth.

- Access: All children and their families have year-round access to, and supportive services for, healthy physical and social-emotional development and success in high-quality early childhood and elementary education.
- Positive Learning Climate: All educators, families, and policymakers understand and address the impact of learning climate on social-emotional development, attendance, engagement, academic achievement, and ultimately student success.
- Teacher Preparation and Effectiveness: All teachers of children ages 0 to 8 are equipped with evidence-informed skills, knowledge, and resources that effectively meet the literacy needs of each child in a developmentally appropriate manner.

### ABOUT THE DIRECTOR OF GET GEORGIA READING CAMPAIGN

Since December 2012, Arianne Weldon has served as the director of the **Get Georgia Reading Campaign**, a statewide effort formed by state and community leaders who developed a common agenda as a framework for action so that all children in Georgia become proficient readers by the end of third grade. In that role, Arianne, who holds a Master of Public Health from Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health, uses her background in public health to encourage Campaign partners to take a new approach to improving early literacy. By using multi-dimensional data to identify patterns of risk and protective factors related to language and literacy development, Arianne has helped the Campaign to find clues leading to new solutions and to change the conversation about what is needed and what is possible in creating a new future for Georgia's children. Her work includes connecting and convening decision-makers from across the state to inspire collective action and innovation in creating the conditions essential for children to succeed—including language-rich adult-child interactions beginning at birth, addressing the logistics necessary to achieve access to services and supports, fostering positive learning climates, and well-prepared and effective teachers.

Arianne was appointed by the Governor of Georgia to serve as a board member for the newly established Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy. She was also appointed by the Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Community Health to serve as a member of its Medical Care Advisory Committee and by the president of Amerigroup Georgia as a member of the steering committee for the Georgia Families 360 program. Additionally, she was appointed by the First Lady of Georgia to serve as a member of the Georgia Children's Cabinet. Before taking leadership of the **Get Georgia Reading Campaign**, Arianne served as the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Services Title V Administrator for the Georgia Department of Public Health. Earlier, she served as director of State Partnership Strategies for Georgia Family Connection Partnership where she served as liaison to state-level population-based initiatives across multiple state agencies, private sector organizations, and communities across the state.

The Campaign has engaged scores of partners, each of whom is helping to carry out five key roles to firmly root these four pillars throughout Georgia:

- Identify and make sense of factors that affect children's ability to read;
- Use data to change the conversation and align policies and investments to strengthen the four pillars;
- Connect, convene, and support decision-makers in moving from a sector-focused approach to a population-focused approach;
- Inspire collective action and innovation to create the conditions essential for children to be on a path—starting from birth—to reading proficiently by the end of third grade; and
- Celebrate partner successes and clearly communicate the possibilities to realize the common agenda across the state

### Factors Affecting Reading Proficiency

For many years, those focused on children's literacy have focused almost entirely on what happens in the K-3 classrooms, but recent advances in research have revealed that there are many other underlying factors that affect a child's ability to learn to read. As these factors are uncovered, it becomes possible to increase opportunities to improve outcomes. Georgia-focused research has helped us identify numerous factors that affect children's reading:

- Maternal education
- Preterm birth
- Low birthweight
- Living in poverty
- Quality childcare access
- Attendance
- Out of school suspension
- School climate
- Early language exposure and development
- Mental health issues

As Campaign partners work to strengthen each of these factors, we continue to investigate determinants of low reading proficiency to identify other factors as clues for solutions.

### What Research Says About Language Development, Children's Mental Health, and Learning to Read

*When children don't have language, their behavior becomes their language.*

— Judge Peggy Walker, Douglas County Juvenile Court

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), children's mental health refers to the ability of children to reach developmental and emotional milestones, learn and demonstrate healthy social skills, and cope with problems. Language development is the foundation for children's social, emotional, and mental health development—and academic performance (A. Hollo, *American Speech-Language Hearing Association*, 2012). A growing body of research demonstrates the impact of language development on children's mental health and learning to read, including these key findings:

- It is estimated that 12 percent of children have some form of language impairment (S. Rvachew, *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*, 2010).
- It can help to re-conceptualize behavior problems as skill-deficits, and keep in mind that behavior itself is often a form of communication (P. Snow, *The Prevention Researcher*, 2013).
- Children with slow expressive language development at age two (defined as less than 40-50 words and/or no word combinations) are up to five times higher risk for language impairment continuing into elementary school than their counterparts (P.S. Dale & J.L. Patterson, *Language Development and Literacy*, 2009).
- Research among children in kindergarten through second grade shows that children with language impairment are at higher risk for behavior problems than their non-language impaired peers. However, their risk of reading problems is significantly higher than their risk of behavior problems, illustrating that behavior problems among children with language impairment is influenced by their reading ability. The researchers found that if language-impaired children experience problems with reading by second grade, then they are at greater risk of behavior problems as well. In other words, children with language impairment are probably no more likely to develop behavior problems than are children with normal language development—until they confront learning to read. The most likely reason, shown by research, is that language impairment is the precursor, illustrating the need for identifying and addressing language impairment in children during the first few years of elementary school. It also highlights the need to carefully monitor and support the reading progress of children with language impairment (J.B. Tomblin, X. Zang & P. Buckwalter, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 2000).
- Speech-language problems are the most frequent disability of childhood, yet they are the least identified (Sices, L., et al, *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 2003).
- The prevalence of previously unidentified language deficits in children age 5 to 13 with mental health disorders is 81%. In other words, 4 in 5 children with mental health disorders have a language deficit that escaped the attention of significant adults when screenings, early evaluations, and speech-language therapy could be meaningful. (A. Hollo, *Exceptional Children*, 2014).
- Involving Speech and Language Therapists in behavioral evaluations of children thought to have ADHD may improve the likelihood that symptoms of language impairment are not attributed to symptoms of attention deficit (D. Gooch, et al, *BMC Psychiatry*, 2017).
- Children and adults with mental health issues are significantly more likely to have limited reading proficiency (A. Lincoln, et al, *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 2006).

### From Research to Action

Knowing what the research says about the interplay between language development, children's mental health, and learning to read is instructive and should be viewed as a call to action.

For further information on the work of the Get Georgia Reading Campaign, contact Ms. Weldon at [Arianne@gafcp.org](mailto:Arianne@gafcp.org).

## UNIVERSAL SCREENING IN SCHOOLS

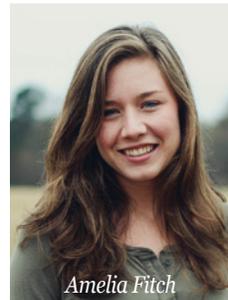
# Best Practices in Universal Screening of Children's Mental Health, Part 1, Ensuring Readiness for Universal Screening



Emily Graybill



Andrew Roach



Amelia Fitch

By Emily Graybill, PhD,  
Andrew Roach, PhD,  
and Amelia Fitch, MEd  
*Georgia State University Center for Leadership in Disability*

As increased federal funding is dedicated to the integration of school and community mental health services, educators are exploring ways to identify youth who could benefit from school-based mental health services. Universal mental health screening is one way to identify these youth. Through universal screening, schools assess all enrolled students to identify students with potential mental health concerns who otherwise might have been missed by reliance on teacher referrals (Ekland et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2014).

When preparing to implement universal screening for mental health, it is important for schools to engage in intensive planning to establish their readiness to implement screening. Before implementing universal screening, schools should first consider the following:

- Educator buy-in
- Parent buy-in/Consent
- Resource availability following identification

**Educator buy-in.** Due to the proactive rather than reactive nature of universal screening and because resources must be allocated to the screening process before significant educational need is indicated, educator support is imperative for a screening initiative to be adopted by a school (Dowdy et al., 2015). Administrators influence funding and personnel allotment necessary to universal screening (Dowdy et al., 2015) and teachers are often the ones completing screeners or coordinating student participation (Glover & Albers, 2007; Oakes et al., 2014), so their support is crucial as well. By helping educators understand their influential role in the screening process, greater support may be achieved. Here is a list of talking points to provide to educators who may be cautious about participating in the universal screening process:

- The universal screening tool is used to determine the number of students who may be experiencing difficulties as well as to identify students who may need additional supports, and for the direct purpose for better understanding of how to support students to be academically and socially successful in school.
- Screening tools consist of items that teachers use to rate their classroom of students based on the teacher’s current knowledge with clear evidence of each individual student’s behavior. [Note: For some items (e.g. lying, cheating, stealing), it will be important to have documentation to support your response.
- Documentation could include emails or notes to families, notes from phone or in-person meetings with families, or office discipline referrals.] Remember that the screening process is not intended as an assessment of static traits or personality, and it is not used to determine eligibility for or access to programs such as special education. It should be used as one of many data sources to inform instruction and to indicate student well-being or difficulties.

**Parent buy-in/Consent.** Parents should be well-informed about the universal screening process. Parent buy-in is vital due to the need for parental consent for students to participate in any survey, analysis, or evaluation that may reveal “sensitive” information per the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (1978). Two parental consent options exist: active consent and passive consent. Active parental consent requires parents to sign a form and return it to the school to allow their child to participate; passive parental consent involves the parent signing and returning the consent form only if they opt their child out of participation (Range, Embry, & MacLeod, 2001). Leading up to the request for parental consent, a school administrator should introduce the universal screening process at an in-person parent event. The Project AWARE schools reviewed the following *frequently asked questions (FAQs)* with parents when they introduced the universal screening process. These FAQs can be modified based on the nature of the universal screening initiative.

**Q: Does my child’s participation in Project AWARE activities mean my child has done something wrong?**

**A:** No. The intent of the Project AWARE grant is to develop a comprehensive, coordinated, and integrated program for advancing wellness and resilience in educational settings for school-aged youth.

**Q: What if I don’t want my child to participate in the Project AWARE activities?**

**A:** All of the Project AWARE activities are designed to build wellness and resilience in youth. We want all children to be successful in our school environment. Many of the Project AWARE activities will be integrated into the school day for all students. You will be contacted by the school if your child is recommended for additional supports through the Project AWARE grant. You may speak with your school about opting out of activities.

**Q: Why do you need to screen all the kids? My kid seems to be doing fine.**

**A:** The purpose of universal screening is to identify ways the school can better meet the needs of all children. When we analyze the screening data, we will determine additional supports that are needed school-wide, in

individual classrooms, and for individual groups of students. The intent of the screening process is to identify how we can increase the success of all kids in the school environment.

**Resource Availability.** Universal screening does not serve students in-need if the appropriate resources are not made available to students following identification. Levitt, Romanelli, and Hoagwood (2007) affirmed that school-based universal screening programs should be linked to appropriate resources for follow-up evaluations and support services within the school and community. Without this linkage to available services, identified students are left unsupported. To avoid this ethical dilemma, schools should coordinate support services for students identified by the program before conducting universal screening. This can be achieved through the resource mapping and gap analysis processes discussed below.

Through the resource mapping process described by the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA (2006), teams review the school’s resource availability and capacity to address diverse social/emotional needs prior to conducting screening. The resource mapping process helps to identify the mental health supports provided by the school for youth with different levels of need by asking:

- What resources are currently in place in our school?
- How do students access the resources?
- How many students have been served by those resources?

The following table provides an example of a structure school personnel may use to detail various evidence-based interventions at each tier of

*Table 1. Resource Mapping Template*

Tier of Support	Name of Program	Contact Person	Schedule	Grade Level	Eligibility	How to Access	# Served
Tier 1							
Tier 2							
Tier 3							

*Table 2. Example School-Based Resources Organized by Tier of Intervention*

Name of Program	Type of Program	Tier of Intervention
No Place for Hate	Bully Prevention	Tier 1
Sources of Strength	Suicide Prevention Curriculum	Tier 1
Ending the Silence	Mental Health Awareness & Stigma Reduction	Tier 1
Second Step	Social Emotional Learning; Bully Prevention	Tier 1
Staff Training on Universal Screening	Screening and Detection; Staff Awareness and Buy-In	Tier 1
Internalizing Curriculum for Classroom Guidance	Mental Health/Social Emotional Learning	Tier 1
Youth Mental Health First Aid	Mental Health Awareness & Stigma Reduction	Tier 2
Passport to Manhood/Smart Girls	Mentoring	Tier 2
Ladies of Distinction		
Discuss Individual Student-Level Data	Individualized Supports	Tier 3
Georgia Association for Positive Behavior Support	Positive Behavior Support	Tiers 1, 2, & 3

support. Identification of these elements of support ensures there are no gaps in resource availability, thereby increasing schools' readiness for universal screening and subsequent student support.

Following the resource mapping process, schools should conduct a gap analysis. The process of evaluating available resources can reveal gaps in schools' mental health supports at all tiers. It is important to identify and describe gaps in tiers 1, 2, and 3 supports available to students, and to specify how the gaps in support will be filled prior to universal screening. This process ensures that schools have the ability to serve their students' mental health needs should students be identified as having needs through the universal screening process. Schools should have at least one evidence-based support for students at each tier of intervention. Table 2 provides an example list of programs identified by one school during their gap analysis process; one or more of the listed programs could fill the gaps in that school's available mental health supports.

### Georgia Project AWARE and Universal Screening

All Georgia Project AWARE districts have been implementing universal screening for mental health for the past two years. All districts have been trained on the readiness process described in this article. In addition to the readiness steps described above, Georgia Project AWARE districts have been encouraged to select screening schools based on these two criteria: (1) PBIS schools with a high level of implementation fidelity and (2) schools in which the administrator has expressed explicit interest in and support for the universal screening process. The roll-out of universal screening through Georgia Project AWARE has been nearly seamless. This success is attributed to the leadership demonstrated by the Georgia Project

AWARE District Coordinators in ensuring that their schools are trained and prepared to implement screening, and that their schools are trained and prepared to use the screening data to make decisions about supports needed by their students.

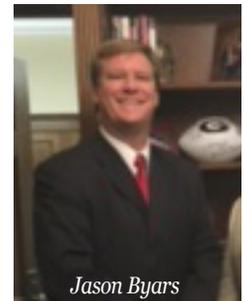
*Part 2 on Best Practices in Universal Screening will be continued in the Winter Issue of GPAD.*

### SEL CURRICULUM AT TIER 1

## Griffin-Spalding County Schools Roll-out Elementary SEL Curriculum at Tier I

By Jason Byars, EdS

*Director of Project AWARE and PBIS  
Griffin-Spalding County Schools (GSCS)*



Jason Byars

In November 2016 GSCS formed an Elementary Behavior Committee charged with providing additional behavior supports to its eleven PK-5 schools. The committee reviewed research, disaggregated data, and explored best practices to develop a comprehensive proposal for improving elementary school climate. In January 2017 the committee

### POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORT (PBIS): A THREE-YEAR PROGRESS SUMMARY (2015-2017)

#### TRAINING OUTCOMES

- **Participating LEAs:** 96 (53%) of Georgia LEAs now have active PBIS district teams, Georgia surpassed the 50th percentile in FY17.
- **Schools trained since 2015:** 551 PBIS schools trained since 2015, an increase of 97%.
- **Students currently impacted by Georgia PBIS:** 663,000 students (39%) are currently served in PBIS schools. This represents an increase of over 400,000 students since 2015.
- **GaDOE PBIS - National Exemplar:** Georgia is now among 8 states (16%) that have trained 1,000+ schools in PBIS. Georgia accounts for approximately 4.5% of the 25,000 schools trained in PBIS nationally.
- **Georgia PBIS Schools Implementing with Fidelity:** Since 2015, there has been a 120% increase in the number of schools implementing the PBIS framework with fidelity.

#### DISCIPLINE OUTCOMES

- **Out of School Suspensions (Rate):** Georgia's annual suspension rate has decreased by 31% since 2008.
- **Out of School and In School Suspensions (Number of Students):** From 2008-2014 there was a 25% decrease in the number of kids suspended (ISS & OSS).

- **Star Climate Rating (high fidelity):** In 2017 and for the first time since 2015, 91% of high fidelity PBIS schools earned 4 or 5 "Stars" compared to 55% of other Georgia schools.
- **Star Climate Rating (low and high fidelity combined):** In 2017, it was noted that 81% of PBIS schools earned 4 or 5 "Stars" compared to 55% of other GA schools.
- **Star Climate Rating Growth (low and high fidelity):** The average baseline (prior to training) was 3.5 Stars for PBIS schools, by year three all PBIS schools average 4.4.

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES

- **CCRPI:** A 30-pt. difference exists on the CCRPI in schools earning 1 Star and 5 stars on the School Climate Star Rating. (81% of PBIS Schools have 4 or 5)
- **Instructional Time:** PBIS schools can experience >25% increase in instructional minutes due to decreases in their office discipline referrals (ODRs). According Georgia State Univ., high fidelity PBIS schools in Georgia regain more instructional time per 100 students than Low fidelity PBIS schools.

*For further information on PBIS, contact Justin Hill, Program Manager,  
GaPBIS @ JuHill@doe.k12.ga.us*

unveiled a three-year action plan set to be initiated during the 2017-18 school year. As District PBIS Director, I served on the committee. We recognized that our elementary schools are limited in terms of the types of disciplinary consequences available to administrators. Consequently, schools had been experiencing a disproportionate number of students being suspended out of school. As a PBIS District we know the answer is not in disciplining students, but rather in teaching students. This is why we proposed implementing a social-emotional learning curriculum.

GSCS Project AWARE Mental Health Clinician, Rhonda Harris, also served on the committee and stated, “When students misbehave, we ask ourselves



Debbie Crisp presents Second Step lesson using puppets in GSCS's elementary classroom.

to find out the function of the child's behavior. I think we all understand sensory, escape, attention and tangibles. But we have to go deeper. We need to figure out why the child is functioning in such a maladaptive manner. The answer is simple: He does not have the skills necessary to behave or respond appropriately.”

The committee examined behavior-related data to determine interventions

that would be needed. GSCS uses the Student Risk Screening Scale – Internalizing & Externalizing (SRSS-IE) to universally screen all elementary students. Results of the fall 2016 screening indicated that 22.1% of all elementary students scored in the elevated range on the externalizing questions of the SRSS-IE. These results were triangulated with discipline and RTI data to confirm the need for Tier I behavior interventions.

GSCS Project AWARE began piloting the Second Step social-emotional learning curriculum in 2016 and received positive results. Second Step provided the skill-building necessary to teach students how to behave and respond appropriately. The committee recommended a two-year implementation plan providing SEL curriculum to 5 elementary schools in 2017-18 and to 6 elementary schools in 2018-19. Universal screening, discipline, RTI, and Tier II intervention data were examined to identify the 5 elementary schools that showed the greatest need. The Second Step curriculum was paid for with SAMHSA Project Aware grant funds.

The SEL rollout began with a series of teacher and staff trainings on use of the curriculum prior to the end of the 2016-17 school year. Teachers received their curriculum before leaving on summer break so that they could become familiar with the variety of components included in the kits. New teachers were trained during pre-planning of the 2017-18 school year and the official kick-off was set for mid-September. Since the curriculum is being used as a Tier I intervention, all schools conducted their fall

SRSS-IE Universal Screening prior to Second Step being implemented. The curriculum is being taught between September 2017 and January 2018. Students will participate in a winter SRSS-IE Universal Screening in February 2018, and data will be examined to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.

So far, the results have been very promising. GSCS teacher, Kacy Thomas, reported, “Students are LOVING the Second Step curriculum!” The data is looking equally impressive. For the period September 2017, office discipline referrals (ODR) were down 49% in GSCS compared to 2015. Students are spending more time in class instead of being suspended. From 2015 to 2017, the number of days students spent in Out-of-School Suspension (OSS) dropped by 44%, recovering 314 days of lost instruction. From 2015 to 2017, the number of days students spent in In-School Suspension (ISS) dropped by 41%, recovering 305 days of lost instruction. The 619 regained days of suspension equates to 3.54 YEARS of instruction that was added just during the month of September. Contact Mr. Byars at [Jason.Byars@GSCS.org](mailto:Jason.Byars@GSCS.org) for further information on Griffin-Spalding County School System's SEL implementation.

## SEL IN GEORGIA PRE-K CLASSROOMS

# Georgia Pre-K Longitudinal Study Finds Increase in Children's Social Emotional Learning Over Time; Stronger Emotional Support Needed From Teachers by Early Elementary

By Meghan Prendergast Dean, Ph.D.  
Senior Research and Policy Analyst  
*Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning*



Meghan Prendergast Dean

Social Emotional Learning is a cornerstone of children's growth and development. As such, The Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) sought to include this domain in its research surrounding Georgia's Pre-K. Specifically, children's social emotional development as well as teachers' ability to provide a supportive emotional classroom environment is examined in Georgia's Pre-K Longitudinal Study. This study, commissioned by the Georgia legislature in 2011-2012 and conducted by the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is a series of ongoing studies that evaluate Georgia's Pre-K program to examine the quality of Georgia's Pre-K classrooms, the effects of participation in Georgia's Pre-K on children's school readiness skills, and the short- and

long-term outcomes of children attending Georgia's Pre-K. This study, beginning in 2013-2014, includes a longitudinal design that follows a sample of 1,169 children (including 139 Spanish speaking Dual Language Learners [DLL]) who attended 199 randomly-selected Georgia's Pre-K Classrooms.

## This significant decrease in classroom Emotional Support over time creates an opportunity of potential growth for classroom teachers as children advance.

The most recent report includes results from the children's first grade year (Peisner-Feinberg, Morkrova, & Anderson, 2017). Children's skills were assessed across a variety of domains such as executive function skills and social skills. Children's executive function skills were assessed using two measures, Forward Digit Span and Backward Digit Span. The Digit Span measures assess different components of children's working memory. Forward Digit Span tests the phonological loop component of working memory and Backward Digit Span tests the central executive function component of working memory. Social skills were measured through teacher ratings using two subscales of the Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS). The Social Skills subscale rates behaviors that promote positive interactions while discouraging negative interactions. The Problem Behaviors subscale rates behaviors that interfere with social behavior performance or acquisition. The findings from the first grade study demonstrate that children had a significant increase in executive function scores and had significant growth in social skills, while ratings of problem behaviors showed no changes over this period of time from Pre-K through first grade. These findings support the notion that children's social emotional learning can increase over time.

In addition to child-level measures, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) was used in order to examine the quality of teacher-child instructional interactions. The CLASS is comprised of three domains (Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support). The quality of teacher-child interactions, as measured by the CLASS, showed a similar pattern across the randomly-selected Georgia's Pre-K and subsequent kindergarten and first-grade classrooms attended by children in the study. Scores generally were in the middle to high range for Emotional Support; however, there were significant decreases over time, with higher scores in pre-k than in kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. This significant decrease in classroom Emotional Support over time creates an opportunity of potential growth for classroom teachers as children advance into early elementary.

Overall, the findings from this longitudinal study suggest that children who attended Georgia's Pre-K Program continue to exhibit positive outcomes through the end of first grade, growing at expected or greater than expected rates across executive function and behavior skills. Furthermore, classrooms in this study generally score in the middle to high range for Emotional Support. However, the scores show a significant decrease over time. With these findings in mind, Georgia should continue to support children's social emotional development as well as continue

to provide professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their ability to provide a positive social emotional environment for Georgia's youngest learners.

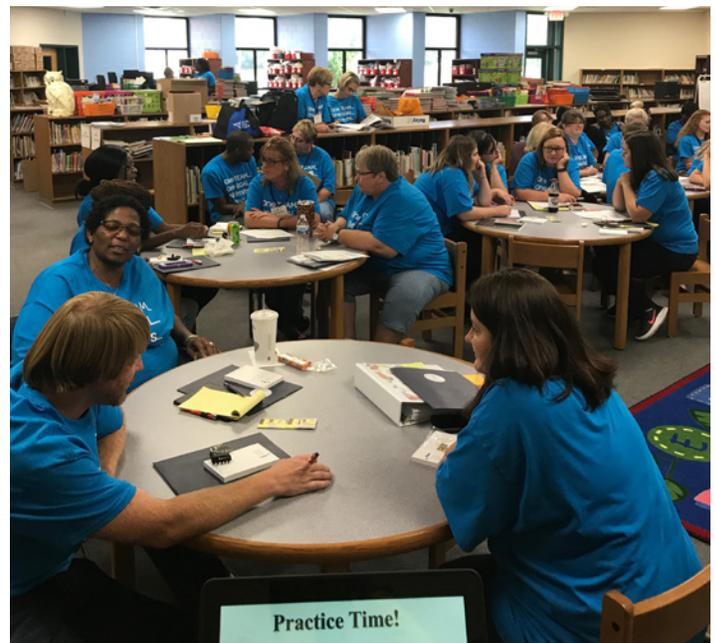
*For further information on Georgia's Pre-K Longitudinal Study, visit <http://dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/GAPreKEvalLongitudinalYr3Report.pdf>.*

### PROJECT LAUNCH TRAINING

## Project LAUNCH Provides Training for MCSD Educators

By Sherrita Summerour  
*Young Child Wellness Expert,  
Georgia Department of Public Health*

Muscogee County's Fox Elementary participated in a training facilitated by Project LAUNCH Georgia on School-based Behavior Management Tools and Techniques this past summer. Project LAUNCH is a federally-funded mental health project serving young children in Columbus, Georgia. It is operated by the Department of Public Health. The opportunity came after the counselor, Annie Phillips, submitted a referral to Project LAUNCH for services. In explaining the services provided by LAUNCH the counselor was excited to hear that training was available for teachers. After speaking with the principal, Yvette Scarborough, Mrs. Phillips reached out to the Mental Health Consultant, Evelyn Roberts, and requested training geared toward de-escalation in the classroom.





There were 40 staff members in attendance: grades K-5, Pre-K Early Success Classroom and Pre-K STEPS classroom teachers, the media specialist as well as the school counselor and principal. The group was able to gain information and ideas on identifying emotional and behavioral challenges in young children, and use of selected tools and techniques for behavior management, de-escalation, and re-engagement in the classroom. Participants received facilitated practice that allowed them to return to their classrooms and immediately apply what they had learned. There was a high level of staff engagement, including numerous questions. The training received lots of positive feedback, and requests were made for Project LAUNCH to return for more training on different topics. Project LAUNCH continues to partner with Fox Elementary's Pre-K Program through its universal screening process and referrals from the Counselor.

For more information on Project LAUNCH activities, contact [sherrita.summerour@dph.ga.gov](mailto:sherrita.summerour@dph.ga.gov).



## PROJECT AWARE UPDATES

### Georgia Project AWARE (GPA) Personnel Move to New Positions

Congratulations to Cheryl Benefield, former GPA Family and Community Engagement Specialist, who is now Program Manager of GaDOE's Safe and Drug Free Schools Program. Tammi Clarke, formerly Director of the Muscogee County School System's PBIS Program and Project AWARE, has joined the State PBIS staff as a Regional PBIS Program Specialist. We wish both Cheryl and Tammi much success in their new positions, and thank them for their tremendous contributions to Georgia Project AWARE.

### Newton County School System's Book Bus Delivers Books, Food Packages and Information to Families

The Book Bus in Newton County School System is used to deliver children's books, food packages, and helpful information on community mental health, social services and other programs to families throughout the County. This initiative is supported by local partner agencies and stakeholders in collaboration with the School District.

— Adrienne Boisson, Project AWARE Coordinator, Newton County Schools

## SELECTED RESOURCES ON SEL

- The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional & Academic Development Fast Facts About SEL: [www.AspenSEAD.org](http://www.AspenSEAD.org).
- The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Fact Sheet: [http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/SEAD-Fact-Sheet\\_Final.pdf](http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/SEAD-Fact-Sheet_Final.pdf).
- Description of SEL in Practice: <http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CASELBrief-WhatDoesSELLookLikeinPractice-11-1-15.pdf>.
- SEL Video: <http://www.edutopia.org/keys-social-emotional-learning-video>.
- American Institutes for Research (AIR) - SEL Solutions: <http://www.air.org/resource/social-and-emotional-learning-sel-solutions-air>.
- American Institutes for Research (AIR) - Policy Center: <http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Ten-Key-Ideas-for-Social-Emotional-Learning-School-Climate-October-2016.pdf>.
- Dusenbery, et al. *Skills for Life*. In *Principal*, September/October 2016. [https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/Dusenberyetal\\_SO16.pdf](https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/Dusenberyetal_SO16.pdf).
- Rock, L. & Crow, S. Not Just "Soft Skills": How Young Children's Learning & Health Benefit from Strong Social-Emotional Development (Whitepaper). Too Small to Fail Foundation, May 2017. <http://m.toosmall.org/resources/TSTF-SED-Whitepaper.pdf>.
- National Academies Press: Report on Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century (2012) is available at <http://www.nap.edu>.
- Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, Research on Emotional Intelligence: <http://ei.yale.edu/>.