



Antiracist Social and Emotional Learning

Puget Sound Educational Service District is committed to supporting the implementation of gap-closing practices that create racially just and humanizing school systems. As districts are implementing guidance on the inclusion of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), we aim to create understanding around the harm that Social and Emotional Learning devoid of an antiracist lens can cause. This document serves as a unified call to action to seize the opportunity to intentionally implement Antiracist Social and Emotional Learning, moving away from harmful, dehumanizing practices and focusing on creating the conditions for healing of youth who identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color. Now is the time for transformation.

Why Antiracist Social and Emotional Learning?

Social and Emotional Learning that is provided in absence of an antiracist lens can do more harm than good to our students of color. “When SEL professionals and others intentionally or unintentionally adopt a culture-blind philosophy and framework, people of color are being woefully failed and marginalized” (Ford, 2020). Black, Indigenous, and People of Color students are living in a world that is increasingly filled with negative hate and bias toward them. Failure to teach SEL within the larger sociopolitical context makes the learning irrelevant to our students in a time where SEL skills could help “build communities that foster courageous conversations across difference so that our students can confront injustice, hate, and inequity” (Simmons, 2019). To avoid harm, Simmons suggests that educators must:

- Understand their power, privilege, and unconscious bias
- Provide safe, nonjudgmental spaces for conversations about race
- Avoid imposing a dominant White, Western, and individualistic set of values about behavior, conflict resolution, relationship-building, and decision making
- Strengthen connections with students, their families, and communities (Simmons, 2017)

It is important to recognize the context in which Antiracist SEL work is supported. The story of America is the power of common people coming together around a vision of opportunity, democracy, and a better way of life for generations to come. However, from our earliest beginnings, that vision was executed with instruments of brutal and legalized oppression, heavily fueled by racial bias, which for centuries has metastasized through every system of American life: healthcare, education, employment, policing, faith, technology, and infrastructure (Grio-Dr. John H. Jackson, 2020).

Things to Consider

- Most Social and Emotional Learning standards are rooted in Eurocentric norms, which serve to disempower, marginalize, police, or harm (negate) Black, Brown, or Indigenous children (ATN: [Guide for Racial Justice & Abolitionist Social and Emotional Learning, 2020](#)).
- Antiracist SEL is culturally responsive and centers vulnerability, healing, joy and community (ATN). It models “a process whereby students and teachers build strong, respectful relationships founded on an appreciation of similarities and differences, learn to critically examine root causes of inequity, and develop collaborative solutions to community and societal problems” (CASEL, 2018).
- Antiracist SEL requires educators to identify and dismantle systems, practices and instruction which sustain white supremacy across all levels of our educational institutions.
- SEL cannot be rooted in White norms that serve to marginalize or even police Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities.

Educators and professionals from preschool through high school must understand the implications and historical context of “race, racism, White privilege and implicit bias in holding students back” ([Aspen Institute, 2018](#)). Focusing only on student SEL and not attending to the needs of adults will not yield the positive impacts we hope to see through an intentional focus on Antiracist SEL, particularly in student discipline ([Gregory & Fergus, 2017](#)). When adults interrogate their own implicit biases and the impact on relationships with students and families and align practices, then SEL moves away from the harm of institutional racism.

What is Antiracist Social and Emotional Learning?

Antiracist Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) “takes a view that recognizes and values the diverse social and emotional skills students bring with them to the classroom. Further, it relates students’ individual social and emotional struggles to their lived experience with racial injustice and social inequity” ([Caven, 2020](#)). [OSPI's](#) definition of SEL is: “Social and Emotional Learning is broadly understood as a process through which individuals build awareness and skills in managing emotions, setting goals, establishing relationships, and making responsible decisions that support success in school and in life.” Rather than being pursued as two separate bodies of work, the field needs to identify ways in which equity and social, emotional, and academic development can be mutually reinforcing ([Aspen Institute, 2018](#)).

[CASEL](#) states that “Antiracist Social and Emotional Learning centers vulnerability, healing, joy and community” and models “a process whereby students and teachers build strong, respectful relationships founded on an appreciation of similarities and differences, learn to critically examine root causes of inequity, and develop collaborative solutions to community and societal problems” ([CASEL, 2018](#)). Antiracist SEL is central to relationship-building, and all teaching and learning. It is not a behavior management strategy, nor should it only be a standalone curriculum, an additional class, or set of lessons.

Why it Matters

- **Students**
Value a commitment to equity and diversity in their educators and should be represented in classroom activities as their full selves.
- **Educators**
Be aware that the absence of a racial equity lens when providing Social and Emotional Learning impacts negatively on those students identifying as Black, Indigenous, People of Color and continues to support assumptions, beliefs and practices in our educational systems which arise from institutional racism.
- **District Staff and PD Providers**
Recognize that SEL is not just about skills for students and adults, but must also focus on the resources necessary to create equitable educational settings, school cultures and inclusive climates.
- **System Leaders**
Continuously investigate and identify how existing SEL frameworks and policies, procedures, practices are weaponized against Black, Brown, and Indigenous children and communities, and seek to actively transform those harmful practices.
- **Families and Communities**
Are key partners in Antiracist SEL efforts. Families and communities hold wisdom that is a valuable contribution to any effort endeavoring to support SEL.



Recommended Actions You Can Take

Superintendent and School Board

- [Seek to comprehensively understand](#) institutional racism as manifested in the educational system. Evaluate strategic plans and allocate resources to align with the vision/mission of the district, with a particular focus on [discipline practices](#). For example, [Bellevue Policy](#), Critical Criteria Process Template, [PSTC Playbook Page 1-2](#).
- Create opportunities to elicit input from students, parents, families and CBOs by centering their voices. Examples include [The BELE Framework: Building Equitable Learning Environments](#).
- Develop a shared, district-wide school-based mental health system vision and action plan to enhance school-based mental health services and supports.
- When sharing materials with parents and/or community groups, translate into home language(s) and consider combining with an infographic visual and or video to accommodate different learning styles and languages.
- Provide Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)/Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) district-wide coaches. [See example from OSPI](#).

Building Administrator

- Create expectations for staff for engaging in [strong partnerships with families](#). [Flamboyant Foundation](#) offers a model.
- Have clear expectations and model antiracist practices using tools such as [PSESD Racial Equity Tool](#), [Roadmap for Reopening School](#), and [Equity and SEL](#).
- Reference [WA State SEL Implementation Guide](#).
- Provide and coordinate dedicated staff who will deliver a responsive mental and behavioral health multi-tiered system of support, designed to meet the social emotional needs of the students. The system should include collaboration across teams to support academics, behavior, and mental health. [See example from OSPI](#).
- Ensure that each student has a trusted adult in the building who cares about them and knows them well.

Classroom Actions

- Engage in vigilant self-awareness through classroom approaches that offer activities for self-reflection to enhance ability to disrupt White privilege.
- Acknowledge racism and the ideology of White supremacy. Include classroom approaches that promote healthy discomfort and acknowledge racism for inclusionary histories, cultures, and identities.
- Study and teach representative history to ensure accurate representation of all racial groups through these possible [resources](#).
- Talk about race with students by sharing race-related stories within context.
- Check implicit bias, as it can come out when engaging in classroom management and [vulnerable decision points](#).
- Do something when you see or hear racism. Zero tolerance of racism supports all students.
- Establish a [classroom centered on community](#).
- [Create affirming rituals](#) at the start and end of classes or during transitions.
- Conduct [classroom meetings](#) using [Restorative Practices](#).

The Ongoing Journey

Antiracist Social and Emotional Learning must be at the heart of our work to fully realize the promise of just and humanizing school systems. Antiracist SEL should be infused into all aspects of school culture. It can't be separated from instruction or seen as an add on. It also can't be seen as only a need for students. All partners in the system have roles and responsibilities in this work. Broader equity efforts support antiracist SEL and vice-versa. Educators should consider their own internalized White superiority/racial oppression in order to make changes to create affirming spaces for children and adults in schools. In Antiracist SEL, adults must adapt their practices, instructional strategies, and/or approaches to meet the needs of all students. In the classroom, Antiracist SEL humanizes learning and teaching through creating authentic connections and relationships with students, families, community, and educators. These relationships support dismantling inequities, transforming systems and centering the healing, belonging, and thriving of adults and youth.



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