



Cherokee County
School District

*Committee Report
and Initiative
Updates
November 2019*

Social and Emotional Learning Initiative

Cherokee County School District

Section I: Purpose

The Superintendent's Ad Hoc Committee for Social Emotional Learning was formed to take a whole-child approach in order to identify the needs of CCSD's students beyond academics. This data-driven process objectively identified the district's strengths as well as its opportunities to improve student health and well-being. Cherokee County School District (CCSD) recognizes that comprehensive and innovative approaches to teaching and learning are needed to ensure that all students acquire the knowledge and skills to be college, career and life ready in the 21st century. Often, the knowledge and skills needed for student success are those not explicitly stated in State academic standards nor assessed on standardized assessments.

Top 10 Skills 2020 Graduates Need

- Complex Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking
- Creativity
- People Management
- Coordinating with Others
- Emotional Intelligence
- Judgement and Decision-Making
- Service Orientation
- Negotiation
- Cognitive Flexibility

World Economic Forum (weforum.org)

Therefore, the challenge set forth by the Superintendent of Schools is one of a moral obligation – to positively impact not just the minds of Cherokee students, but also their hearts. As a learning organization, we must engage our community and partners to embrace all of our children to ensure their success and well-being.

The committee formed a strong belief statement and vision for intentional integration of social-emotional learning:

Cherokee County School District believes in strengthening our school community through a focus on Social Emotional Learning, a process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to

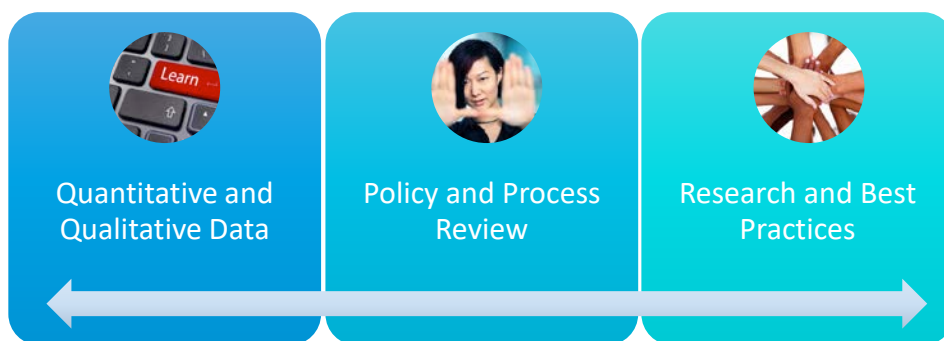
- ▶ ***understand and manage emotions***
- ▶ ***set and achieve positive goals***
- ▶ ***feel and show empathy for others***
- ▶ ***establish and maintain positive relationships***
- ▶ ***make responsible decisions.***

Our vision is that all CCSD students will thrive today, tomorrow and throughout life with a sense of purpose and self-worth.

This report offers recommendations based on the findings from months of study with a broad, districtwide committee well-equipped to tackle this important work. As the committee's work continued to unfold, the work truly challenged a traditional notion of a school's role and forced the realization of a new role based on a modern student need. To address those needs, the organization must continue to be willing to learn and grow with a commitment to keeping students central to our work.

Section II: Methodology

The Committee's work consisted of a review of internal quantitative and qualitative data, current CCSD policies and practices, and the latest research from the field. The task was to collect evidence and artifacts through multiple sources to make an informed determination of student need, identify gaps in services and create recommendations for next steps.



As portrayed in the graphic above, sample data sets and policies reviewed included, but were not limited to, the Georgia Health Survey, Panorama Ed Data, CCSD Policies, Code of Conduct, Suicide Protocol, At-Risk Data, Hospital Homebound Data, and Discipline Data, as well as National Mental Health Trends.

National Mental Health Trends	
1 out of 7 children ages 2-8 are diagnosed with mental health and behavioral disorders	Multiple Sources
16% of high schools students have thought seriously about suicide	
Average age of depression: 1978 - 29 years of age; 2018 - 14.5 year of age	
1 in 12 high school students have committed self-harm (e.g. cutting)	

Research and best practices reviewed from multiple sources included, but were not limited to, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL); Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development; Edutopia; the Wallace Foundation; and the Committee for Children.

One meta-analysis from 2017 analyzed results from 82 different interventions involving more than 97,000 students from kindergarten to high school, and the effects were assessed six months to 18 years after the programs ended.

The research showed, for example, that:

- up to 3.5 years after the last intervention, the academic performance of students exposed to Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs was an average of 13 percentile points higher than their non-SEL peers.
- at other follow-up periods, conduct problems, emotional distress, and drug use were all significantly lower for students exposed to SEL programs, and development of social and emotional skills and positive attitudes toward self, others, and school was higher.

www.casel.org/2017-meta-analysis

The evidence was clear and compelling for the committee. At every turn, data, journal articles and stories from the field showed the immediate and long-term impact of intentional SEL practices on not only student's social and emotional well-being but also on their academic growth.

Section III: Guiding Framework

The Committee, after careful review, recommends that CCSD adopt the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Competencies as our framework for Social and Emotional Learning. These Five Core Competencies are integrated to promote **INTERPERSONAL**, **INTRAPERSONAL** and **COGNITIVE** skills and abilities. Additionally, each of the five competencies have clear descriptions for providing a roadmap for all students and staff.

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



Additionally, the Framework emphasizes not only the role for teachers in the classroom, but also for leaders and staff at the school level, and family and community partnerships. There is a critical role for all members of our school community.

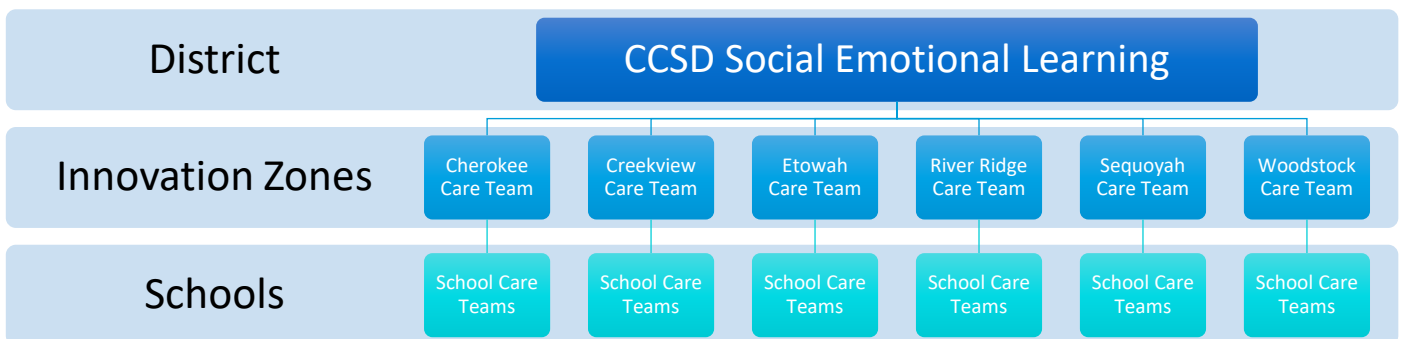


Section IV: Recommendations

The Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations are organized into two categories. The first category represents overarching recommendations for the entire initiative. The second category contains five individual core area recommendations and corresponding action steps.

Category I: Overarching Recommendations

1. Identify a **District Lead for SEL** who can work across departments at the district level and with all schools to create a systemic plan, coordinate implementation, and monitor progress over multiple years.
2. Appoint a **District SEL Oversight Committee** representative of the district and school staff, community agencies and partners to work collaboratively in support of the district plan for SEL. The plan will impact all facets of the organization and will require coordination and long-term commitment.
3. Create **Innovation Zone Care Teams** to prioritize needs, coordinate services, provide professional development, and organize crisis response by Innovation Zone. Team members may include but are not limited to Innovation Zone Principal, District Lead Nurse, Lead Psychologist, Lead Counselor, and Social Workers, Psychologists, and Counselors within a Zone.
4. Create **School Care Teams** to identify needs, provide services, and monitor progress for students within the school. Team members may include but are not limited to the School Nurse, Counselor, Psychologist, Social Worker, ILS, Administration, and Teachers.



5. Develop **SEL Embedded Curriculum** with instructional strategies for content integration into daily lessons and resources for teachers, counselors and staff to use in support of the CASEL Competencies.
6. Provide systemic **Professional Development** for all staff and for specialized roles to ensure knowledge gaps identified are closed and the skills and abilities staff need to serve the whole child area realized.

7. Create a **SEL Resource Library** for Staff and Parents that provide resources, articles, videos, Q&A, and links to support for a variety of topics related to the wellness of students, staff and our community.
8. Identify and nurture critical **Community Partnerships** within Cherokee and surrounding counties to garner the services and support all students and their families need to thrive.

Category II: Core Area Recommendations

The recommendations focus on sensitive topics that the committee felt must be addressed both internally and externally within our community. There are opportunities for professional growth, as an organization, as well as the development of policies that support research-based practices.

Core Areas for Social Emotional Learning				
Equity and Cultural Competence	Positive Behavioral Framework	Mental Health and Suicide Prevention	Trauma-Informed Practices	Staff Well-Being and Self-Care

Equity and Cultural Competence

Recommendation: Establish systemic guidelines for developing cultural competence and leads to equity and access for all.

Action Steps:

1. Conduct a districtwide needs assessment to measure the on-going level of cultural competence and identify strengths and weaknesses of the organization as a whole, as well as within specific schools.
2. Provide, monitor and support cultural competence training for 100% of staff and students.
3. Identify consistent data sources and assessment tools used to track progress toward cultural competence.
4. Refine the locally-developed portion of the School Improvement Plan to emphasize SEL and cultural competence.

5. Develop a deeper understanding of culturally proficient pedagogy and seek resources at all levels to support a more diverse curriculum.
6. Identify avenues of community outreach and secure resources for school staff to easily communicate with students and families who speak a language other than English (translators, parent liaisons, etc.).
7. Recruit a workforce representative of the students we serve.

Positive Behavioral Framework

Recommendation: Define and implement a positive behavioral framework to change the mindset from solely punitive to one of growth and development.

Action Steps:

1. Create a districtwide committee to define the CCSD positive behavioral framework.
2. Provide professional development to support positive behaviors, growth mindsets and behavioral coaching practices.
3. Add an action code in the student information system for “behavioral coaching” in order to track support for student actions.
4. Develop examples of appropriate usage of the Positive Behavioral Framework for guidance for staff and for parents.
5. Embed the Positive Behavioral Framework in daily routines and instruction

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

Recommendation: Establish and maintain positive relationships with all students to implement measures that focus on mental wellness and prevent self-harm/suicide.

1. Prioritize counseling services and redistribute other duties that take time from direct interaction and support for students exhibiting signs of mental health issues, self-harm, or suicide ideation. *(American School Counselor Association recommends 80% or more time be direct or indirect services with students)*

2. Review the allotment of psychologist-to-student ratio to ensure we are providing an appropriate level of service to all students. (*National Association of School Psychologists recommends 1:700-900*)
3. Provide training for psychologists to provide full wrap-around services for students beyond special education compliance.
4. Provide staff awareness and training on signs and symptoms of mental illness and risk of self-harm.
5. Increase student awareness of signs to look for and actions to take if they, or one of their peers, want to harm themselves or others.
6. Develop a list of community resources and partners that provide support and services to our students and families.
7. Investigate expanding Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services to include Student Assistance Program (SAP) services.

Trauma-Informed Practices

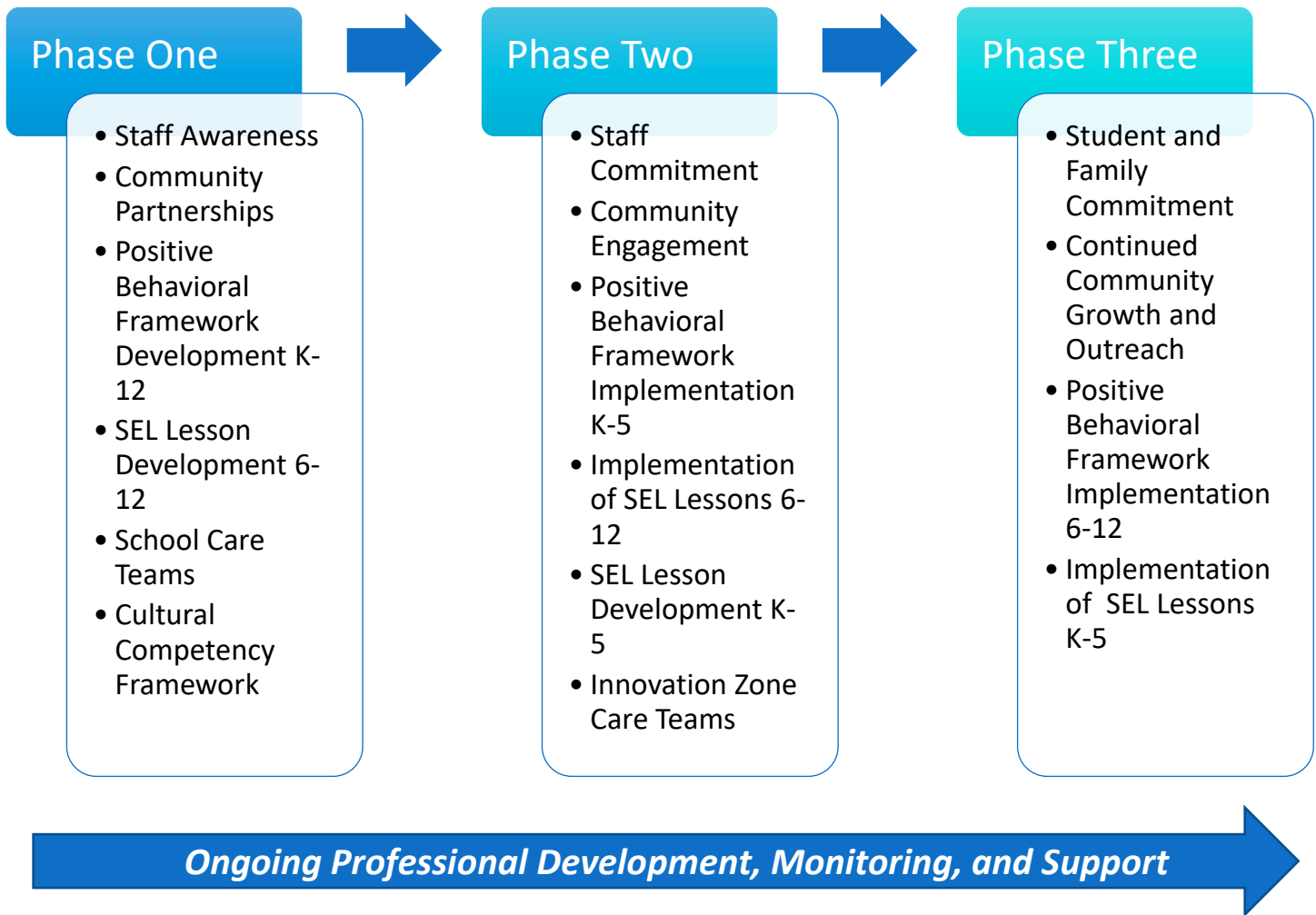
Recommendation: Build and implement strategies to embed trauma-informed practices within schools and classrooms in order to meet the individual needs of all students.

1. Investigate adding personnel highly-qualified in implementing trauma-informed practices and crisis response to coordinate Innovation Zone Care Teams.
2. Review the allotment of social worker-to-student ratio to ensure we are providing an appropriate level of service to all students. (*Georgia Department of Education recommends 1:2475*)
3. Create professional learning offerings to teach trauma-informed practices to all stakeholders.
4. Continue to incorporate SEL components into daily instructional practices.
5. Utilize data, both qualitative and quantitative, to identify at-risk students and monitor through School Care Teams.

Staff Well-Being and Self-Care

Recommendation: Promote the well-being and self-care of employees and value their contributions to our students and community.

1. Review current allocation of time and duties to ensure professional educators are maximizing time for students, support for families, collaboration time with colleagues, as well as balancing time for their own personal life.
2. Provide all employees with a menu of services offered through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
3. Promote self-care and wellness through work-based offerings (e.g., Wellness Wednesday, Mindful Moments, etc.).
4. Create an anonymous survey to determine the personal and professional needs of employees in order to best meet their needs.
5. Increase opportunities to celebrate employees for both professional and personal accomplishments.

Section V: Implementation Timeline**Section VI: Closing**

On behalf of the Committee, we are humbled by the task set forth by the Superintendent of Schools and honored to work in a school district that puts the health and well-being of Cherokee's students and staff above test scores. Our children are our future, and the way in which we respond to not only a national crisis but a health crisis that has affected our own students, speaks volumes about who we are as an organization and as a community. We are grateful for the opportunity to identify the needs of CCSD's students beyond academics and are ready to take on the heartfelt challenge of caring for the whole child.

In June 2019, Dr. Brian V. Hightower, Superintendent of Schools, presented his recommendations for a new Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Initiative to the Cherokee County Board of Education. With the overwhelming support of the Cherokee County community, the Cherokee County School District (CCSD) and School Board began the work outlined in the Superintendent's Ad-Hoc recommendation report. The CCSD SEL Framework was officially kicked-off at the District's first Convocation in more than 27 years with the Superintendent's bold declaration, "Our students are not data points!"



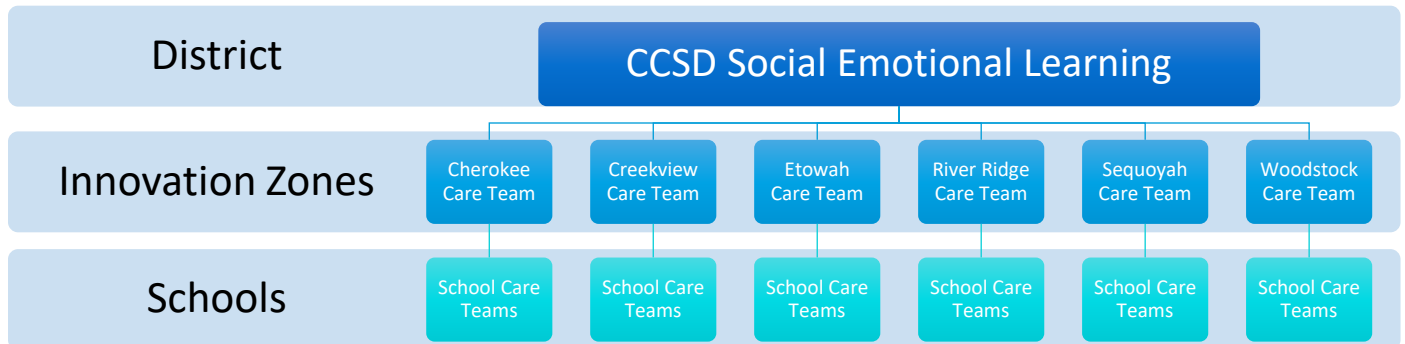
The following updates serve as a **SEL Scope of Work** and reflect a **Status Update** on the progress of the CCSD SEL Framework.

Section VII: SEL Initiative Recommendation Updates

Category I: Overarching Recommendations Timeline

1. Dr. Debra Murdock was appointed as the **District Lead for SEL** in July 2019. The CCSD SEL Framework has been supported across all offices and throughout all schools with a focus on systemic planning and coordinated implementation.
2. Dr. Hightower appointed **District SEL Oversight and Advisory Committees** that are representative of the CCSD and school staff, community agencies and partners-in-education. The first meeting took place on November 1, 2019, with subsequent meetings to follow. The committee has been commissioned to work collaboratively in support of the plan for SEL.
3. **Innovation Zone Care Teams (ICT)** will be piloted in January 2020 and will support **School Care Teams (SCT)** in prioritizing needs, coordinating services, providing professional development and organizing crisis response by Innovation Zone. The newly appointed **Student Support Specialists** will provide guidance and support to **SCTs** while serving as lead for the **ICTs**. **ICT** members may include; but, are not limited to: Innovation Zone Principal, District Lead Nurse, Lead Psychologist, Lead Counselor, Social Workers, Psychologists and Counselors within a Zone.

4. **School Care Teams (SCT)** will be launched in January 2020 to identify needs, provide services and monitor progress for students within the school. School team members may include; but, are not limited to: the School Nurse, Counselor, Psychologist, Social Worker, ILS, Administration and Teachers.



5. A **SEL Design Team** was assembled to develop **SEL Embedded Curriculum** beginning with grades 6-12. The team will develop instructional strategies for content integration into daily lessons and resources for teachers, counselors and staff to use in support of the CASEL Competencies.
6. A systemic **Professional Development plan** is underway for all staff and for specialized roles to ensure knowledge gaps identified are closed and the skills and abilities staff need to serve the whole child area realized.
7. A **SEL Resource Library** for staff and parents that provides resources, articles, videos, Q&A, and links to support for a variety of topics related to the wellness of students, staff and our community is under construction. SEL resources including books and other print materials have been sent to each school while electronic resources are shared through the CCSD SEL Webpage <https://www.cherokeek12.net/Content/social-and-emotional-content>.
8. Critical **Community Partnerships** are being established and nurtured within Cherokee and surrounding counties to garner the services and support all students and their families need to thrive: including, but not limited to: Northside Hospital-Cherokee, Cherokee Sheriff's Office (CSO), Goshen Valley Boys' Ranch (GVBR), Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS), Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), Highland Rivers Health, Georgia HOPE, Woodstock City Church, First Baptist Church Woodstock, Cherokee County Youth Ministers Advisory, Council on Drug and Alcohol Abuse, 7 Mindsets, Kennesaw State University, Reinhardt University, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Delay (DBHDD), Cherokee County Child Advocacy Center, New York Life and Cherokee FOCUS.

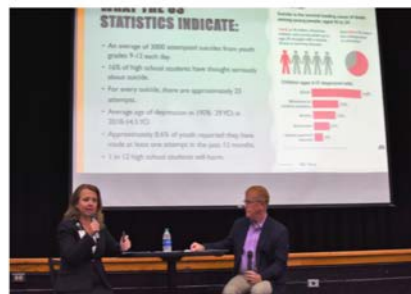
9. A **Social Media Awareness Campaign** was created to share information, promote understanding and spotlight the focus of the SEL Initiative. The SEL Team, with support from the Office of Communications, created both Twitter and Facebook platforms with the identities **@CCSDCares** to serve as a medium for awareness campaigns focused on SEL, Positive Behavior Supports, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Awareness, complete with a video launch of the SEL Vision Statement.



10. **SEL Advocacy Opportunities** have allowed CCSD personnel to build professional capacity in SEL professional learning. Social and Emotional Forums have included *On Second Thought* interview (August 2019), Georgia Public Broadcast System; *The State of Education in Georgia* (September 2019), Leadership Conference for Social and Emotional Learning (University of Georgia); *Creating a Blueprint/Framework for Social and Emotional Learning* (October 2019), Georgia School Board Association (GSBA) Drive-In Conference; *The Importance of Social and Emotional Learning* magazine interview (November, 2019), GSBA; *Equity and Cultural Competency: The CCSD Blueprint* (planned for December 2019), Georgia School Board Association Conference; *Creating a Culture for Social and Emotional Learning* (February 2020), Georgia Association of Secondary School Principals (GASSP); and 2020 East Education Congress Advisory (February 2020).

How Schools Use Social, Emotional Learning Curriculum To Teach Mental Health

By VIRGINIA PRESCOTT, ELLEN ELDRIDGE & AMY KILEY • AUG 12, 2019



As mental health becomes a political talking point, Georgia schools are finding innovative ways to make social and emotional learning part of the curriculum.

Dr. Debra Murdock is the executive director for Cherokee County School District's Social Emotional Learning initiative. She spoke to *On Second Thought* on the importance of sustaining mental balance for students.

Category II: Core Area Recommendations

Core Areas for Social Emotional Learning				
Equity and Cultural Competence	Positive Behavioral Framework	Mental Health and Suicide Prevention	Trauma-Informed Practices	Staff Well-Being and Self-Care

Equity and Cultural Competence

Recommendation: Establish systemic guidelines for developing cultural competence and leads to equity and access for all. **Action Steps highlighted in blue are in progress but not yet implemented.*

Action Steps:

1. In partnership with all CCSD Offices and as a reflection of vision of the CCSD Strategic Planning process, a parent and employee survey was developed to explore the District's understanding of several important focuses of SEL and staff-wellness. Further, focus groups including students, parents and teachers have been planned for each of the CCSD's high schools to allow for feedback on cultural competency related initiatives.
2. **Provide, monitor and support cultural competence training for 100% of staff and students.**
3. The SEL team has identified several sources of data to serve as informational resources and accountability markers including discipline and tribunal data, Panorama Survey data, Georgia Health Survey data, At-risk roster data and DFCS reporting data, in addition to traditional achievement indicators.
4. In collaboration with the Office of Curriculum and Instruction, School Improvement Plans were refined at all school sites to emphasize a SEL goal and plan in the locally-developed portions.
5. **Develop a deeper understanding of culturally proficient pedagogy and seek resources at all levels to support a more diverse curriculum.**
6. **Identify avenues of community outreach and secure resources for school staff to easily communicate with students and families who speak a language other than English (e.g., translators, parent liaisons, etc.).**
7. The Office of Human Resources has created a strategic personnel recruiting plan to include universities and colleges that would provide opportunities to hire a more diverse workforce.

Positive Behavioral Framework

Recommendation: Define and implement a positive behavioral framework to change the mindset from solely punitive to one of growth and development.

Action Steps:

1. In January 2020, the CCSD Positive Behavior Framework Committee will begin work on creating the first CCSD **Positive Behavioral Framework** including recommendations for Redemption Practices for students who meet the qualifications to earn early expulsion relief.
2. In collaboration with the Office of Curriculum and Instruction, the CCSD SEL Team is developing a plan to provide summer professional development opportunities to support positive behaviors, growth mindsets and behavioral coaching practices.
3. The Office of School Operations has added an action code in the ASPEN student information system for “behavioral coaching” in order to track support for student actions.
4. **Embed the Positive Behavioral Framework in daily routines and instruction**



Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

Recommendation: Establish and maintain positive relationships with all students to implement measures that focus on mental wellness and prevent self-harm/suicide.

1. Six CCSD schools, including three high schools, two middle schools and one elementary school, volunteered to pilot the redistribution of non-counseling duties to other staff members in order to prioritize counseling services and support for students exhibiting signs of mental health issues, self-harm or suicide ideation (*American School Counselor Association recommends 80% or more time be direct or indirect services with students*).
2. The CCSD Offices of Human Resources and Financial Management will work collaboratively to discuss potential allotment requests and flexibility models focused on the CCSD's psychologist-to-student ratio (*National Association of School Psychologists recommends 1:700-900*).

3. The SEL Team has created a systemic, districtwide training plan for all staff members including school psychologists who serve as valuable resources for mental health information.
4. In collaboration with our local partners utilizing best practices from DBHDD, a comprehensive professional learning program is under construction to provide staff awareness and training on signs and symptoms of mental illness and risk of self-harm.
5. Increase student awareness of signs to look for and actions to take if they, or one of their peers, want to harm themselves or others.
6. A comprehensive list of community resources and partners including those that provide support and services to our students and families has been created and is located on the Student Services/SEL tab on the CCSD Website.
7. In partnership with the Office of Human Resources and Risk Management, multiple avenues for expanded Student Assistance Programs are currently being explored.
8. A “Parent University” series has been created for parents and community stakeholders on Suicide Awareness and Prevention in collaboration with Highland Rivers Health.



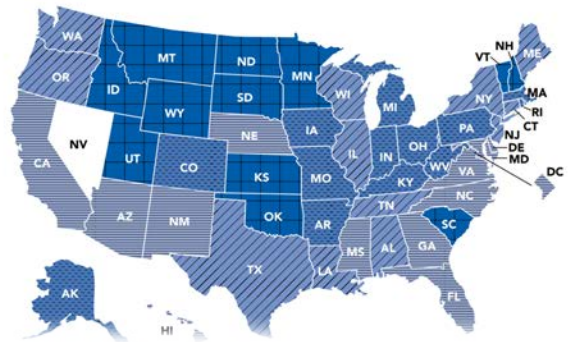
PROBLEM:

Suicide rates increased in almost every state.

Suicide rates rose across the US from 1999 to 2016.

Dark Blue	Increase	38 - 58%
Medium Blue	Increase	31 - 37%
Light Blue	Increase	19 - 30%
Very Light Blue	Increase	6 - 18%
White	Decrease	1%

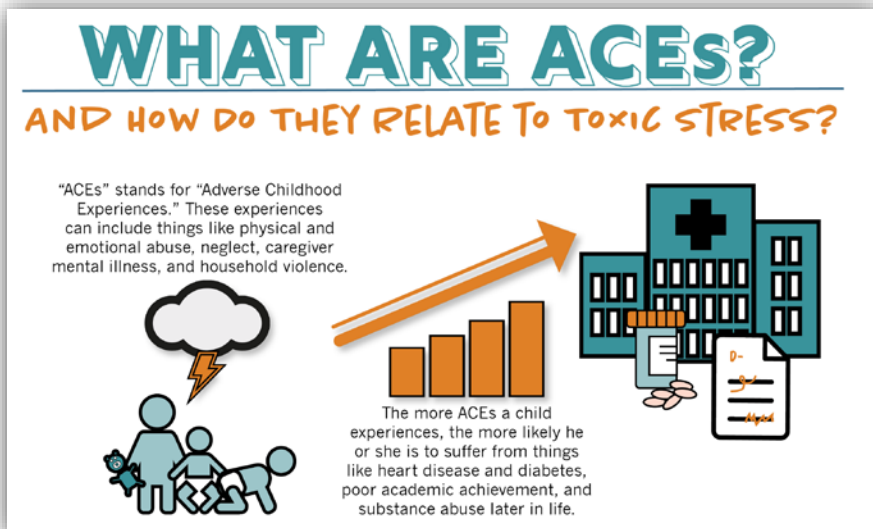
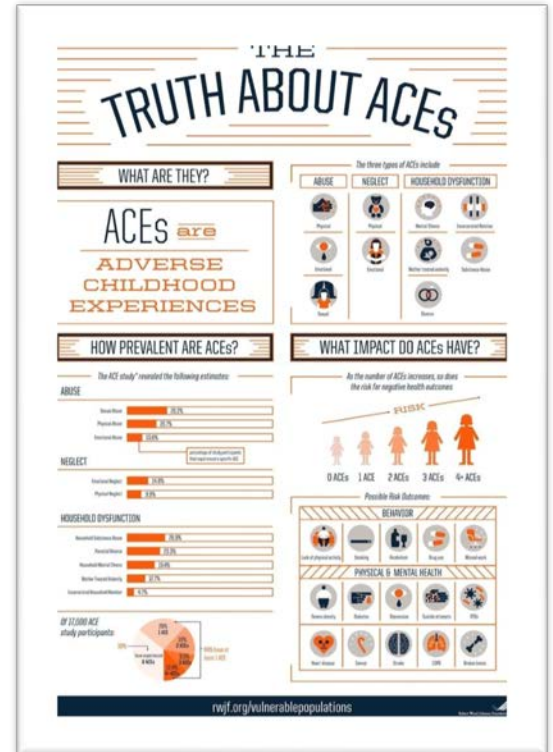
SOURCE: CDC's National Vital Statistics System;
CDC Vital Signs, June 2018.



Trauma-Informed Practices

Recommendation: Build and implement strategies to embed trauma-informed practices within schools and classrooms in order to meet the individual needs of all students.

1. CCSD added two **Student Support Specialists** who are highly-qualified in implementing trauma-informed practices and crisis response, and who will coordinate the CCSD **Innovation Zone Care Teams**.
2. In collaboration with the Offices of Human Resources and Financial Management, CCSD staff will review the allotment of social worker-to-student ratio to ensure students are provided an appropriate level of service.
3. The CCSD SEL Team is working collaboratively with the Office of Curriculum and Instruction to create professional learning offerings to teach trauma-informed practices to all stakeholders.
4. CCSD leaders, teachers, counselors, nurses, psychologists and social workers will continue to incorporate SEL components into daily instructional and operational practices through the further development of school culture and climate.



5. The **CCSD Student Support Specialists** have created a plan to utilize data, both qualitative and quantitative, to identify at-risk students and monitor their progress through SCTs and ICTs.

Staff Well-Being and Self-Care

Recommendation: Promote the well-being and self-care of employees and value their contributions to our students and community.

1. Review current allocation of time and duties to ensure professional educators are maximizing time for students, support for families, collaboration time with colleagues, as well as balancing time for their own personal lives.
2. With the support of the CCSD Employee Assistance Provider (EAP), LifeWorks, a relaunch of the program has occurred. All employees will have access to a full menu of services offered through the EAP and the availability of utilizing a redesigned app for staff convenience.
3. In collaboration with the Offices of Human Resources and Financial Management, a **Wellness Ambassador Program** was launched in October to promote self-care and wellness through work-based offerings (e.g., Wellness Wednesday, Mindful Moments, etc.).
4. CCSD staff created and administered an anonymous survey to determine the personal and professional needs of employees. The survey also informed the collaborative efforts of staff in planning for accountability markers in the new CCSD Strategic Blueprint.
5. In conjunction with the Office of Communications, several employee recognition and celebration campaigns have been developed including *CCSD Thank a Teacher*, *#ThePowerofOne*, and *#IttakesaVILLAGE*.

