

Spotlight on... Social Emotional Learning

By Peter Light, Assistant Superintendent of Schools

School Climate and Culture as the Foundation for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)



The Franklin Public Schools have made a significant commitment to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) for the 2017-18 School Year and beyond. School climate and culture has long been recognized in the research as a foundation for effective schools and Franklin's schools remain committed to this as a guiding principle. Inclusive and culturally responsive school environments have been placed at the forefront of our [District's improvement efforts](#) and are interwoven through each of our four strategic objectives. Our administrators laid the groundwork for this effort in our [Letter of Inclusivity](#) to the Franklin community, which was published in early September. This letter provided a framework to recommit to expanding our work around Core Values, providing safe and supportive schools for our students and teachers, and ensuring that our policies and practices combat all forms of hate and discrimination.

A Culture Built on Core Values

Almost a decade ago, the District committed to a set of [Core Values](#) which were developed through the strategic planning process. In recent years, each of our schools worked with students, faculty and families to personalize the Core Values that reflect the individual cultures within each of our neighborhood schools.

The Core Values of each school have since become more than a set of words, having been infused into the cultures of the schools through morning meetings, whole school assemblies, competitions and other activities. At the District level and as part of Dr. Ahern's entry plan, Dr. Ahern is learning from stakeholders and exploring the Core Values of the District and connecting them to norms of behavior, approaches to problem solving, and school improvement. This work is being done as part of the Superintendent's entry plan, which will culminate in a report of findings in January and a new strategy for school improvement next spring/summer.

Safe and Supportive Schools that Connect Students and Adults

Connecting students and adults within the schools is a primary strategy in ensuring that students feel both safe and supported. In elementary schools, morning meetings, which employ strategies from [Responsive Classroom](#), focus on connecting students to each other and the adults within the schools. At the middle level, students and teachers participate in advisories for the same purpose.

Last year, Franklin High School piloted an advisory program focused on connecting students and adults and has fully implemented the advisory program this year.

Combatting all Forms of Discrimination and Hate

Beginning last Spring, the Franklin Public Schools reviewed its policies and practices around combatting all forms of hate and discrimination. To ensure that we provide an environment that makes clear to students, families and our community that we do not tolerate hate or discrimination in any form, we have taken a series of steps district-wide.

Recently, the Franklin School Committee Policy Subcommittee revised the District policy pertaining to [Harassment/ Discrimination](#). This policy provides the guiding framework for the District's policy and procedures for responding to any incidents of harassment or discrimination. We have also revised our [Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan](#) and published our [Parent/Community Anti-Bullying Training](#) in video format on our District website to make these materials accessible to families. Simultaneously, we revised our online [Incident Reporting Form](#) to make clear that the reporting form may be used to report both incidents of bullying or harassment/ discrimination.

We are continuing to ensure that staff receive the most current training in issues surrounding bullying, harassment and discrimination in our schools. Our administrators participated in Civil Rights training last Spring, and this January, we will complete training for all of our faculty and staff around bullying, discrimination and harassment.

One of the most exciting initiatives of the year in helping to develop safe, supportive and culturally responsive environments was recently launched at each of our three middle schools. A [World of Difference](#)® is a program developed by the Anti Defamation League that is designed to promote schools of "respect, inclusivity and civility." Faculty and administrators attended training sessions and students in the 7th grade at each middle school are currently participating in the student mentor training program, with the goal of facilitating discussions in sixth grade classrooms this Spring. While this is a pilot year for our middle schools, Franklin High School has begun researching how this program may be expanded to grades 9-12 next fall.