



**Board Workshop Date:** March 26, 2024

**Title:** Tier 1 Social Emotional Learning Update

**Type:** Discussion

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**Description:** Strategy C of the strategic plan states that Edina Public Schools fosters a caring school environment where students and staff feel safe physically and emotionally in order to be fully engaged in their academic/professional, personal, and social growth. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an important part of ensuring that EPS is fostering that caring school environment. The body of this report includes: background information on social and emotional learning, information about the district's current tier one SEL practices including data and feedback around a specific curriculum pilot - Character Strong, and lastly an update on goals and next steps for SEL work in light of recent grants awarded to Edina Public Schools.

**Recommendation:** This report is intended to be an update to the school board. No recommendation is being made at this time.

**Desired Outcomes for the Board:** After reviewing the report, please consider what needs additional clarity and be prepared to share your questions with administration.

**Background Materials:** See attached report

## Introduction:

Several research studies (Buckle, J.) indicate that social-emotional learning is linked to academic achievement. For example, a 2017 meta-analysis from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) shows that investment in social emotional learning (SEL) has led to improved classroom behavior, better stress management, and 13 percent gains in academics. Research conducted by Panorama Education (100,000 students across 200 schools) has found that compared to students with low SEL, kids with high SEL are twice as likely to have above-average grades, 60 percent less likely to have one or more behavior incidents over the course of a year, and half as likely to be chronically absent (Buckle).

Given the outcomes of the research shared above, as EPS continues to grow its Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) it is vital that the focus is not only on academics but social emotional learning (SEL). The Minnesota Department of Education's (MDE) MTSS Framework (2022) indicates that an important indicator of a comprehensive MTSS system is that "Evidence exists that all teachers are implementing evidence-based academic and SEL practices across content areas on a daily basis for every student" (pg. 24). Not only does guidance from MDE point towards ensuring both academics and SEL practices are being provided at tier 1 but the Edina Public Schools 2020-2030 Strategic Plan indicates several areas where this is also a priority:

**Table 1: 2020-2030 EPS Strategic Plan Priorities around SEL**

<b>Priority Strategy</b>	<b>Strategic Action</b>
<b>Strategy B:</b> Ensure and Equitable and Inclusive School Culture	<b>B.1.</b> Create learning environments and curricula that enable staff and students to learn from and reflect on their own and others' experiences; explore multiple perspectives; practice civil discourse; encourage empathy; create interpersonal connections; and embrace diverse identities.  <b>B.2</b> Create a school culture that enhances learning and fosters a sense of belonging for all students through our values of Integrity, Compassion, Courage, Commitment, Appreciation, and Responsibility
<b>Strategy C:</b> Foster Positive Learning Environments and Whole Student and Staff Wellness Support	<b>C.1.</b> Ensure students acquire and apply the social emotional competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making to promote student wellness. <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Survey teachers to determine their understanding and beliefs around social emotional learning to move forward with tier needs assessment process</li><li>2. Conduct focus groups with secondary students as stakeholders in the development of Tier 1 SEL services</li><li>3. Identify universal screening and progress monitoring tools to baseline and monitor student growth in response to training</li></ol>

	<p><b>C.5.</b> Create environments that are conducive to learning and facilitate constructive interaction.</p> <p>3. Identify, train and implement restorative practices to improve student and staff ratings of positive school climate</p>
<p><b>Strategy D:</b> Develop Leadership Throughout the District</p>	<p><b>D.2.</b> Provide robust and balanced professional development</p> <p>3. Ensure staff has a deep understanding in the instruction of social emotional skills and characteristics and embeds the development of those skills throughout the school environment to address the whole child</p>

By ensuring that evidence-based SEL practices are part of tier 1 programming (tier one being the instruction that each and every student receives), EPS can ensure that we’re moving forward with strategic actions and creating a caring and inclusive school culture that supports the whole child.

**Background Information:**

Social emotional learning at the tier one level is taking place at each building in Edina Public Schools. Highlights of tier one SEL practices across the district are shared in table two below. Three elementary buildings (Countryside, Highlands, and Concord), Valley View Middle School, and a small group of teachers at Edina High School have been engaging in a pilot of a tier one SEL curriculum called Character Strong. Subsequent sections of this report will give more information about the outcomes and feedback regarding the current Character Strong pilot. Additionally, this report will update the school board on next steps regarding upcoming SEL taskforce work in light of recent grant money awarded from MDE.

**Table 2: Tier 1 SEL Highlights for each EPS Building**

EPS School	Tier 1 SEL Highlights
Edina Early Learning Center	The ELC has been incorporating the Pyramid Framework for 6 years now. Pyramid was developed in partnership between the Center for Excellence and U of Mn. Pyramid is a framework created to support the Social Emotional competence in young children. The entire ELC staff has been through an intense 5 year training to give them the skills to help children. All ELC classrooms use the same strategies, language and resources to help young learners navigate their world. Classroom teams meet with coaches to analyze their practices as well as the students' learning environment. Teams employ a data capture allowing them to look at any areas of celebration or opportunities to grow. Teams analyze data within their teams and/or coaches regularly and it is reviewed monthly as a larger school team. Pyramid has been a game changer for the ELC. ELC staff members have seen a decrease in the number of kids struggling with their SEL skills, a decrease in the length of time those that do struggle need to re-engage in learning, and an increase in the capacity of our staff to help students develop their SEL skills.

Concord Elementary	Piloting Character Strong - please see subsequent sections of this report.
Cornelia Elementary	Cornelia has an SEL Committee and uses Second Step curriculum in the classrooms. Cornelia’s SEL committee leads the building in whole school assemblies to teach about school-wide expectations for learning. Second Step is a curriculum that helps students build social-emotional skills - like nurturing positive relationships, managing emotions, and setting goals - so they can thrive in school and in life.
Countryside Elementary	Piloting Character Strong - please see subsequent sections of this report.
Creek Valley Elementary	<p>Creek Valley Elementary has incorporated the Leader in Me program as part of its school-wide student engagement work since 2014. The Leader in Me is a school transformation process based on the work of Franklin Covey. Just as Covey developed a framework for adults (7 Habits of Highly Successful People), so too The Leader in Me has a framework for student development. The focus of the program is to build in students leadership and life skills (sometimes referred to as 21st Century skills) so as to create a culture throughout the school that builds on student empowerment and engagement. At the core of the program is the central belief that every child has the potential and ability to be a leader. The 7 Habits of the Leader in Me Program are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be proactive</li> <li>2. Begin with the end in mind</li> <li>3. Put first things first</li> <li>4. Think win-win</li> <li>5. Seek first to understand, then to be understood</li> <li>6. Synergize</li> <li>7. Sharpen the saw</li> <li>8. Bonus Habit #8 - Find your Voice</li> </ol> <p>Current CV 5th graders have had the opportunity to build upon their leadership skills since Kindergarten. With the Creek Valley school motto, “Go Out and Make A Difference”, this <i>Leader in Me</i> program has enhanced student leadership and sense of belonging both in and out of school.</p>
Highlands Elementary	Piloting Character Strong - please see subsequent sections of this report.
Normandale Elementary	<p>Normandale uses Caring School Community which staff members have translated into French. It comes from Collaborative Classroom which is the EPS English language arts curriculum.</p> <p>SEL is incorporated into the schedule and every classroom starts with a meeting that helps build community. Normandale has SEL Buddies</p>

	<p>between 1<sup>st</sup> &amp; 4<sup>th</sup> grades, 3<sup>rd</sup> &amp; Kindergarten and 5<sup>th</sup> &amp; 2<sup>nd</sup> grades. They meet twice a month to work on different activities from the curriculum.</p> <p>Normandale also has a French SEL library to supplement our SEL curriculum. Kany Seck, Administrative Dean, put the titles in a database with themes and synopsis for easy use for teachers.</p>
South View Middle School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students receive SEL lessons during their daily Advisory time (right away in the morning)</li> <li>• Students participate in weekly Circles during their Advisory time</li> <li>• Any student may be invited to attend a social skills flex team taught by our social worker, counselor, and a special education teacher</li> <li>• Students have access to student services at any time as needed for additional support</li> </ul> <p>Advisory lessons and circles are created by teachers/leaders in the building, include a weekly or monthly theme (such as compassion, identity, respect, etc) and based on what need we are seeing with students. In addition, we often use restorative circles in response to student behaviors or other needs</p>
Valley View Middle School	Piloting Character Strong as part of advisory - please see subsequent sections of this report.
Edina High School	Piloting Character Strong - please see subsequent sections of this report.
Edina Virtual Pathway	Edina Virtual Pathway has expanded its SEL support for students by allocating time from both a school counselor and a school social worker to the EVP program. Having these roles in place ensures that students have access to support with things like engagement in school and enhancing emotional well-being.

**Overview of Character Strong Pilot:**

Character Strong is a research-backed curriculum that increases belonging, well-being, and engagement for students and staff ([characterstrong.com](http://characterstrong.com)). The curriculum is created for tier one so that every student receives foundational SEL support. The elementary curriculum (being piloted at Countryside, Highlands, and Concord) has grade-level-specific lessons and activities that are web-based and offer flexible delivery. The elementary curriculum is focused around three outcomes: Be Strong, Be Kind, and Be Well. Instruction centers around one character trait per month (see table 3 below) and the content is aligned with CASEL competencies. Lessons are also vertically-aligned from PreK-5th grade to ensure students build skills effectively. The Character Strong middle and high school curriculum are also centered around the CASEL competencies (Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making) with three major outcomes - Well Being, Belonging, and Engagement. Each year focuses on a different theme outlined in table 4 below.

**Table 3: Scope and Sequence of Character Strong Elementary Curriculum**

<b>Character Strong Outcome</b>	<b>Traits within Outcome</b>
<b>Be Kind:</b> Social skills and conflict resolution	Respect Empathy Cooperation
<b>Be Strong:</b> Executive functioning - focusing, organizing, goal-setting	Responsibility Perseverance Courage
<b>Be Well:</b> Wellness strategies and emotion regulation	Gratitude Honesty Creativity

**Table 4: Scope and Sequence of Character Strong Secondary Curriculum**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Lesson Areas of Focus</b>
6th Grade & 9th Grade	Belonging: How can we create a place where everyone feels like they belong?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Foundation - Setting the Stage for Community Building</li> <li>● Values &amp; Purpose</li> <li>● Emotional Understanding and Regulation</li> <li>● Empathy and Compassion</li> <li>● Goals and Habits</li> <li>● Leadership and Teamwork</li> <li>● Reflections</li> </ul>
7th Grade & 10th Grade	Well-Being: How do I develop personal well-being and how does it affect my relationships with others?	
8th Grade & 11th Grade	Engagement: How do we practice engaging meaningfully in our lives, or friendships, and in our schools?	
12th Grade	Leadership: How can we work to build a better world through personal influence and effective teamwork?	

The following timeline provides an overview of the Character Strong curriculum pilot in EPS:

**2021-2022 School Year**

- The former director of Student Support Services tasked the school social work team to conduct a review and put forth a recommendation for an evidence-based, tier 1 SEL curriculum based on SEL outcomes from the initial district-wide Panorama SEL surveys. The team determined that the Character Strong curriculum would be the recommendation.
- Valley View Middle School began incorporating Character Strong curriculum materials into their advisory curriculum
- Countryside Elementary School began making preparations to implement Character Strong for fall 2022 as a pilot school

**2022-2023 School Year**

- Fall 2022:
  - Countryside Elementary began their initial pilot of the Character Strong curriculum building-wide.
  - Valley View Middle School continued with utilizing pieces of the Character Strong

- curriculum within their advisory materials
- Winter 2023: Social Work team collaborated with MTSS Coordinator to reiterate recommendation of Character Strong and inquire about growing the pilot to other interested buildings.
- Spring 2023:
  - Countryside principal and social worker shared Character Strong implementation and outcome data at the district Instructional Leadership meeting indicating positive outcomes (data shared in following report section)
  - Highlands Elementary School and Concord Elementary school expressed interest in piloting Character Strong for the 2023-2024 school year. Both schools worked with the MTSS coordinator to engage in implementation planning for Fall 2023.
  - Initial discussions started taking place at EHS regarding a small pilot of the Character Strong curriculum in advisory.

**2023-2024 School Year**

- Fall 2023
  - Countryside continued their implementation of tier 1 Character Strong curriculum building wide and engaged in a pilot of the tier 2 Character Strong curriculum through small-group interventions with the school social worker
  - Valley View Middle School continued with utilizing pieces of the Character Strong curriculum within their advisory materials
  - Concord Elementary and Highlands Elementary began their pilot of the Character Strong curriculum. Building-wide implementation at Highlands and select grade levels at Concord.
  - EHS Character Strong pilot began at the end of October 2023 with two advisory teachers from each grade level.
- Winter 2023: Mid-year data check in with pilot groups and collection of narrative feedback from piloting teachers. Data summarized and shared in the present board report (please see following section)

**Character Strong Pilot: Current Data and Feedback**

The following tables represent data gathered about the Character Strong pilot within the elementary schools throughout the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years.

**Table 5: 2022-2023 Countryside Pilot Data - 5th Grade Classroom**

Percentage (%) refers to percent of students in the classroom rated by their teacher at a 3 (Quite Well) or 4 (Very Well) with regard to ability to demonstrate skills within each area		
Trait	Fall Score	Winter Score
Self-Awareness	53%	69.5%
Self-Management	39.5%	58%
Social-Awareness	55%	71%
Relationship Skills	43%	58.5%
Responsible Decision Making	37%	60.6%

**Table 6: 2023-2024 Countryside Pilot Data - Student Self Ratings on Character Strong Screener**

Fall: N = 260 (3rd-5th graders); Winter: N = 154 (4th-5th graders*) *3rd grade teachers determined the self-rating tool was too advanced for 3rd grade and did not administer in the Winter Ratings = 1 (not at all) to 5 (very well) with regard to students' own perception of how well they demonstrate characteristics of each trait		
Trait	Fall Average Student Rating	Winter Average Student Rating
Self-Awareness	4.2	4.2
Self-Management	4	4
Social-Awareness	4.4	4.3
Relationship Skills	4.3	4.2
Responsible Decision Making	4.4	4.3

**Table 7: 2023-2024 Countryside Pilot Data - Educator Rating of Whole Class**

K-2 teachers rated their class as a whole with regard to students' ability to demonstrate characteristics of each trait Ratings = 1 (not at all) to 5 (very well)				
Teacher and Grade Level	Trait	Fall Class Average Rating for the Trait	Winter Class Average Rating for the Trait	Growth
Teacher 1 Kindergarten	Self-Awareness	3.6	3.3	Growth made in 4/5 areas
	Self-Management	3.0	3.4	
	Social-Awareness	2.8	3.3	
	Relationship Skills	3.0	3.4	
	Responsible Decision Making	2.7	3.1	
Teacher 2 First Grade	Self-Awareness	5.0	4.4	Growth not made in any area but all ratings remain above 4.0
	Self-Management	5.0	4.3	
	Social-Awareness	5.0	4.7	
	Relationship Skills	5.0	4.6	
	Responsible Decision	5.0	4.4	



	Making			
Teacher 3 Second Grade	Self-Awareness	3.4	4.5	Growth made in all 5 areas
	Self-Management	3.3	4.7	
	Social-Awareness	3.6	4.7	
	Relationship Skills	3.3	4.6	
	Responsible Decision Making	3.6	4.9	
Teacher 4 Second Grade	Self-Awareness	2.9	3.8	Growth made in 2/5 areas
	Self-Management	3.7	3.4	
	Social-Awareness	3.6	3.9	
	Relationship Skills	3.7	3.6	
	Responsible Decision Making	3.7	3.6	
Teacher 5 Second Grade	Self-Awareness	3.3	3.5	Growth made in 4/5 areas
	Self-Management	3.4	3.9	
	Social-Awareness	3.3	3.7	
	Relationship Skills	3.3	3.3	
	Responsible Decision Making	3.4	3.9	
Teacher 6 Second Grade	Self-Awareness	2.4	3.4	Growth made in all 5 areas
	Self-Management	2.4	3.1	
	Social-Awareness	2.4	3.7	
	Relationship Skills	2.9	3.9	
	Responsible Decision Making	2.3	3.1	

**Table 8: Behavior Referral Information for Elementary Pilot Schools**

	2021-2022 School Year	2022-2023 School Year	2023-2024 School Year
	Jan 2022- May 2022	Dec 2022 - May 2023	Sept 2023 - Jan

			<b>2024</b>
Total Number of Behavior Referrals at Countryside Elementary	43	55	44
		<b>September 2022 - January 2023</b>	<b>September 2023 - January 2024</b>
Total Number of Behavior Referrals at Concord Elementary		49	20
Behavior Referral Information for Highlands Elementary			Team shared that behavior referrals are down 21% for this time frame compared to the same time frame last year

**Table 9: Qualitative Feedback from Highlands Elementary**

N = 15 respondents	Shared focus in our community / building	Common Language for SEL	Clear Definitions of Character Traits	Positive Effects on Student Outcomes
What benefits have you seen through the implementation of Character Strong?	13%	40%	26%	33%
N = 15 respondents	Time Only	No Other Challenges	Concern that Curriculum Doesn't Reach All Students in the Classroom	Student Engagement with Activities

Besides time, what challenges do you face in implementing Character Strong for the recommended 30 mins/week?	33%	6%	40%	20%		
N = 15 respondents	Easy to Implement	Flexibility in Lessons	Activities/ Games/ Resources	Conflict Resolution Teaching	SEL Skills for Students	Shared Language
What do you like best about Character Strong?	20%	13%	40%	13%	6%	13%

**Table 10: Qualitative Feedback from Concord Elementary**

N = 13 respondents	Common Language	Kids Enjoy It	Easy to Use	Evidence of Kids Learning Skills	No Benefits Noted	
What benefits have you seen through the implementation of Character Strong?	23%	38%	46%	46%	23%	
N = 13 respondents	Time Only	No Other Challenges	Too Few Games	Feel that Time is not well spent		
Besides time, what challenges do you face in implementing Character Strong for the recommended 30 mins/week?	31%	46%	8%	15%		
N = 13 respondents	Prefer Other	Easy to Implement	Engaging/ Kids Enjoy	Evidence of Kids	Songs/ Games	Nothing at this time

	Curriculum		It	Learning Skills		
What do you like best about Character Strong?	8%	23%	31%	31%	31%	15%

**Data Themes from Elementary Feedback**

The following themes emerge from the data presented in Tables 5-10 above.

- The average of student self-ratings at Countryside remained at least 4.0 in fall and winter of the 2023-2024 school year indicating that students feel that they are demonstrating characteristics of the Character Strong traits at a high level.
- Five of six teachers that rated their whole class with regard to students’ ability to demonstrate characteristics of each trait in both the fall and winter at Countryside indicated growth in at least two character trait areas. This could indicate that implementing the Character Strong curriculum with fidelity leads to growth in student SEL outcomes.
- All elementary buildings piloting Character Strong indicated some decrease in behavior referrals from last school year to this school year.
- When considering the qualitative feedback, the following themes emerged from both buildings that conducted the teacher implementation feedback survey (Highlands, Concord)
  - Benefits of Character Strong: Common language for SEL, evidence of students using the information and learning
  - Challenges of Implementation: Time
  - Liked Best about the Curriculum: Activities, Songs, Games; Easy to Implement

**Secondary Curriculum Pilot Feedback**

At Valley View Middle school, the Character Strong Curriculum is used one time a week on Mondays when the advisory time is longer. Feedback from the advisory planning committee based on their mid-year survey indicates that buy-in from teachers regarding the curriculum is mixed. The sixth grade team finds the curriculum helpful as sixth grade is a time of transition for students. At times, it is more difficult to get the older students (7th and 8th graders) to engage in the curriculum. The advisory planning team tries to adjust the activities for some of the older grades as the topics are relevant and important.

At Edina High School, two advisors from grades 9,10, and 11 volunteered to pilot Character Strong with their advisory students for about 8 weeks. Additionally, the teacher of the 9th Grade Seminar intervention class implemented the curriculum 1 time per week in that class. Check-in meetings were held in the middle and at the end of the pilot window. The following themes were shared in these check in meetings.

*What is working well with Character Strong?*

- The curriculum is easy to navigate
- Kids like the games and it eases them into deeper thinking

*What isn’t working as well as it could with Character Strong?*

- Time - it’s difficult to get to the full lesson in the 25 mins allotted to advisory. Additionally, things like all school assemblies and registration end up taking up the advisory time.
- It was difficult to get students to buy in - mostly to be vulnerable and interact with all students

- in the advisory.
- While easy to navigate, some implementers wished that the slides could be modified or edited to better fit their students' needs

Within the secondary feedback, themes emerge indicating that student buy-in and allocated time for SEL instruction are two barriers that must be considered when determining the best ways to implement tier 1 SEL at the secondary level.

### **Next Steps and Goals for Tier 1 Social Emotional Learning:**

Review of the Tier 1 SEL practices in Edina and review of the data collected throughout the Character Strong pilot indicates areas of strength and areas for continuous improvement. It is a strength that all six of Edina's elementary schools utilize a tier one curriculum. Additionally, both middle schools and the high school have weekly advisory times built into their schedules to support school community relationships and student SEL growth. While an SEL focus is present in all buildings, it is an area for continuous improvement to ensure that students are receiving consistent instruction and making progress towards acquiring and applying the social emotional competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making as outlined in the Edina Strategic Plan. Edina was awarded two grants in the winter of 2024 to help support continuous improvement in this area.

Next steps for Tier 1 SEL continuous improvement supported by the grant funding include:

- Creation of a Tier 1 SEL team that includes staff representation from PreK - 12th grade
- Utilizing Culturally Proficient School Systems (CPSS), Non-Exclusionary Discipline research, and MTSS research within the Tier 1 SEL team to vet current and potential SEL curriculum/tools. Then, designing an implementation plan for the chosen curriculum(a) to ensure we are making progress towards achieving our SEL goals in the Strategic Plan.
- Continuing to build an MTSS system that focuses not only on academic achievement but SEL outcomes as well. This will include:
  - Determining the best ways to collect data around student SEL factors
  - Ensuring Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions align with Tier 1 curriculum(a)
  - Determine who will implement and what will be used for curriculum(a) in Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention.

### **Sources:**

Buckle, J. *Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): Everything You Need to Know*. Panorama Education. Retrieved on February 14, 2023 from:

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