



River Forest
Public Schools

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D90 Social Emotional Advisory Panel – April 6, 2021

Advisory Panel Recommendations for Social Emotional Supports/Structures

As the District continues to focus on supporting the social and emotional needs of our students, staff, and family members during the pandemic, it is vital to incorporate the perspectives and valuable expertise available in our community. During the month of March, the D90 Social Emotional Advisory Panel (SEAP) met numerous times to establish consensus around the essential priorities that must be addressed to ensure that our school community continues to thrive in the future. The panel identified five areas of focus, including *Relationships*, *Social Emotional Programming*, *Trauma-Related Issues*, *Screening and Measurement*, and *Student-Specific Needs*. The D90 SEAP was comprised of stakeholders from across River Forest, including parents, PTO leadership, faculty, staff, students, River Forest Education Association (RFEA) leadership, mental health professionals, social workers, nursing team members, community partners, administrators, and a member of the D90 Board of Education. The Panel relied on several sources of information to guide their recommendations, including internal district resources, articles from educational/research entities, guidance from CASEL (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), member expertise, and stakeholder survey feedback. The Panel employed a collaborative process to identify the primary “areas of focus,” prioritize identified needs, and recommend corresponding solutions. The solutions were then distilled into the final recommendations that are attached to this letter. Please note that an addendum is also attached for each focus area, providing greater detail about many of the high-level recommendations.

Foundational to understanding the nature of these recommendations are several key principles that have been essential elements of the District 90 philosophy for some time, though they are particularly important now as our community continues to respond to circumstances caused by the pandemic. Keeping our key principles at the fore helps to ensure the intentionality of decision-making and that our most important consideration – the needs of individuals – remains the focus. All of the principles are current elements reflected in the D90 Strategic Plan. These principles include:

- Safety
- Equity
- Social Emotional and Physical Wellness
- High Quality Instruction

These key principles cannot be considered in isolation. To ensure that the attached SEAP recommendations can be operationalized such that all members of the school community will continue to thrive, the principles must be considered through an integrated perspective. D90 faculty, staff, and administrators must also be empowered to employ these key principles in decision-making about classroom instruction, anticipating and responding to student social emotional needs, and communicating concerns with family members, when necessary.

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Please note that the attached recommendations are based in consensus, so it is likely that not every member of the Panel agrees with them in their entirety. However, the Panel's expectation is that the recommendations will be considered thoughtfully and implemented with fidelity, to the degree possible. The Panel submits these recommendations to the Board of Education in the spirit of continuous improvement and expects that plans to further social emotional supports and structures will be established and refined over time, and be dovetailed with current strategic plan goals.

The membership of the D90 Social Emotional Advisory Panel (SEAP) hereby submit the attached recommendations for Board of Education approval and suggested implementation. Members of the Panel express gratitude in knowing that these recommendations will receive full consideration.

Trauma-Related Issues

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Gretchen Radach
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Gwen Geraghty
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Relationships

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Social Emotional Programming

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Screening and Measurement

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Brittany Yelnick
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Student-Specific Needs

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Gina Hardy
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Facilitators – Denise Matthews, Ed Condon, Ph.D.

District 90 Social Emotional Advisory Panel (SEAP)
Final Recommendations – April 6, 2021

Focus Area: RELATIONSHIPS

1. Active supports should be instituted to ensure that relationships between students are fostered and remain strong, including both informal and programmatic components.

Note -- *Ex: revisit and revise Advisory program at Roosevelt (see extended notes)*

Note -- *Essential standards work; reviewing curriculum for what is more relevant and important in this time; how to know when a child has mastered skills; seek feedback from youngest learners on an ongoing basis*

2. To further relationships between students and staff, classroom and school-wide strategies should be investigated that will help to establish a strong foundation for the coming year.
3. Intentional efforts should be instituted to redevelop strong connections between family and staff stakeholder groups, predicated on the long history of positive parent-teacher relationships in District 90 that have been foundational to student success.

Note -- *PTO groups/events can help to improve relationships and bring community members together; use of social media to spread the word about good things happening; the District 90 Facebook page and other platforms could be used to highlight positives, be pro-active; continuation of weekly newsletters for parents*

4. Intentional efforts should be instituted between staff and administration stakeholder groups.

Note -- *Genuine opportunities for teachers/staff and administration to process events of the last year, share experiences, and rebuild relationships. Ex: a facilitated conversation that aims to reconnect and rebuild morale and move forward*

5. Opportunities for staff to meet, and locations in which to do so, must be provided so that staff members have the chance to collaborate to fully support student needs.

Note -- *This is an area of strength, if locations for gatherings are designated that work*

Focus Area: SOCIAL EMOTIONAL PROGRAMMING

1. Social emotional programming in D90 must be implemented consistently with an Equity/Inclusiveness lens, as described by the work of the National Equity Project.
2. D90 should collaborate with external partners, parents, and others to strengthen social emotional learning by building shared understanding of its need and vision.
3. D90 should embrace and promote a sense of social-emotional learning as a lifelong process of developing SE skills, such as a modified CASEL framework.
4. An assessment/self-assessment tool for the entire D90 community can be established to provide a way to think about SEL along an improvement continuum for all of us.
5. Existing D90 SE efforts, future programming, and additional self-learning resources should be provided and well-organized in the SE content areas.

Focus Area: TRAUMA-RELATED ISSUES

1. Ensure that deliberate and varied efforts are made so that individuals and stakeholder groups across the District 90 school community understand trauma (i.e., signs, types [including systemic] and developmental impacts of trauma).
2. Normalize the prevalence of trauma, the differential impacts of trauma, help-seeking behaviors, accessibility and use of resources.
3. Leverage and expand current assets (e.g., school-specific PTO equity/SEL efforts, student service clubs, elementary SEL curriculum, middle school Student Advisory Program, PTO newsletters, social media, etc.) to achieve the goals set forth above.
4. Broaden, expand, and capitalize on the District's external partnerships and resources to make them accessible to stakeholders across the school community.

Focus Area: SCREENING AND MEASUREMENT

1. The District should select and administer a social emotional screener for all elementary and middle school students.
2. Protocols should be formalized to ensure that tiered social emotional supports will be provided based upon level of need, with those individuals in crisis eliciting immediate responses.
3. Partnerships with outside community mental health organizations must be maintained to support students' needs as they surface.
4. Student social emotional screening data should be tracked longitudinally to monitor trends and anticipate needs.

Note -- Need to incorporate annual (Fall to Spring) systematic review of data - individual data, cohort data, trend data, disaggregated into stakeholder groups. Identify and leverage effective strategies through intentional, timely analysis.

Focus Area: STUDENT-SPECIFIC NEEDS

1. Awareness must be increased that all students are learning under extenuating circumstances, and communication should be developed to help staff understand differing home learning environments.
2. Homework should be limited, and increased time needs to be dedicated to social emotional learning in school.
3. The District must allow time for staff to continue to work on executive functions and organizational skills and cultivate realistic academic expectations of students as they transition back to a full day school. Communication with families around this goal is necessary.
4. To support student physical wellness and minimize unnecessary screen time, specific steps should be taken such as providing traditional fine motor and writing activities, spending time outside, promoting face-to-face interactions with peers and staff, and interacting with peers off-screen.