

**A SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM ANALYSIS
OF
ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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INTRODUCTION

This document constitutes the final report of a curriculum analysis of Arlington Public Schools (APS)' Social and Emotional Learning programming. The curriculum analysis was conducted offsite during the time period of December 2020 - March 2021. The goal of the curriculum analysis was to examine opportunities for the district to enhance instruction related to social and emotional learning (SEL) and diversity, equity, and belonging (DEB) through culturally relevant pedagogy.

The [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) identifies five core SEL competencies: self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. In sum, SEL refers to life skills that support people in experiencing, managing, and expressing emotions meaningfully, making sound decisions, and fostering rewarding interpersonal relationships. Research shows that SEL protects against adverse risk-taking behaviors, emotional distress, and conduct problems and also contributes to health, academic achievement, and success later in life (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017).

Social and Emotional Learning in APS

Arlington Public Schools (APS) offer a broad and deep array of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) opportunities for students, staff, and families. Based on the materials provided as part of the SEL audit, it is clear that APS is invested in the social, emotional, and academic development (SEAD) and well-being of their community.

After reviewing the submitted materials for this review (i.e., the [Teacher](#) and [Student SEL landscapes](#), the [district SEL website](#), and supplementary materials), we identified the following 18 programs/approaches being used in APS as well additional resources to support staff professional development across SEL, culturally responsive practices, and equity in teaching and learning:

A. Interventions

- a. Mental Health
 - i. Tier 1
 - 1. [Youth Mental Health First Aid \(YMHFA\)](#)
 - a. Primary
 - b. Secondary
 - 2. [Lesley Institute for Trauma Sensitivity \(LIFTS\)](#)
 - a. Primary
 - b. Secondary
 - ii. Tier 2 & 3
 - 1. [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy \(CBT\)](#)
 - 2. [Dialectical Behavioral Therapy \(DBT\)](#)
 - a. Primary
- b. Culture & Climate (Tier 1)
 - i. [Responsive Classroom](#) PK-8
 - ii. [RULER](#) 6-12
 - iii. [Mindful Schools](#) PK-12
 - iv. [Restorative Circles](#)

- v. [Safe and Supportive Schools](#)
 - vi. ASPIRE 6-12 *Unclear which ASPIRE program APS is referring to
- c. Curriculum (Tier 1)
- i. [Open Circle](#) K-5
 - ii. [Second Step](#) PK-8
 - iii. [RULER](#) 6-12
 - iv. [Mindful Schools](#) PK-12
 - v. [Whole Child Lessons](#) K-12
- d. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Response to Intervention
- i. [Positive Behavior Intervention Support \(PBIS\)](#) PK-12
 - 1. [Check-in, Check-Out](#) (CICO)
 - ii. [Pyramid Model](#) PK
 - iii. [Social Thinking](#) PK
 - iv. [Zones of Regulation](#) PK-5 (as Tier 2 and 3)
 - v. ASPIRE *Unclear which ASPIRE program APS is referring to
- e. Additional SEL Ancillary Strategies to support student well-being)
- i. [PlayWorks](#) K-5
 - ii. Advisory 6-12
 - iii. Mindfulness 6-12
 - iv. [Facing History and Ourselves](#)

B. Additional resources recommended for educators as mentioned in the [APS District Plan](#)

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● APS' Mental Health and Well-being Website and Calendar ● BARR Center: Student and Teacher Engagement Strategies ● BELE Framework (Building Equitable Learning Environments) ● Breathe for Change ● CASEL: SEL Roadmap for Reopening School ● CASEL - Adult SEL to Support Antiracist Practices ● Center on Great Teachers and Leaders: Educator Resilience and Trauma-Informed Self-Care (self-assessment and self-care plans) ● Culturally Responsive Teaching ● EDCO Collaborative: IDEAS Courses ● IES / REL Pacific - Including Voice in Education: Addressing Equity Through Student and | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Voice in Classroom Learning ● Making Caring Common Project: Relationship Mapping Strategy ● MIIA EAP ● MindUp ● Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) Office of SEL - 3 Signature SEL Practices ● Rennie Center Back-to-School Blueprints ● SCUTA - School Counseling App ● STAT - Support for Teachers Affected by Trauma ● Transforming Education's SEL Integration Approach for Classroom Educators ● Wise@Work ● Yoga 4 Classrooms |
|--|--|

These many interventions, programs, and approaches have the potential to enhance teaching and learning, relationships, and overall well-being. We reviewed [APS' SEL district plan](#), [SEL Teacher Landscape](#), and [SEL Student Landscape](#), sorted the above 18 approaches we found into four categories of intervention: **1) mental health, 2) culture and climate, 3) curriculum, and 4) RTI/MTSS**, and organized these interventions by functionality into the table below.

These categories are not set in stone as many of the approaches APS uses may apply to one or more categories (e.g., culture and climate; curriculum) and have implications at multiple tiers of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). For example, PBIS and the Pyramid Model are multi-tiered systems of support as well as approaches to culture and climate. Moreover, PBIS and the Pyramid Model could also be considered curriculum if teachers were to use materials from PBIS World or Pyramid Model Practices. Additionally, while some programs consider themselves universal Tier 1 interventions (including Second Step and RULER, which APS is implementing), their theoretical framings have implications for Tiers 2 and 3 instruction and practice.

		Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Mental Health Intervention	Culture and Climate	Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) / Response to Intervention	Student Activities & Resources	PK-12 Student Curriculum	Educator Content & Resources	Structured professional development required
Mental Health	Youth Mental Health First Aid	X			X				X	X	
	Lesley Institute for Trauma Sensitivity (LITS)	X			X (Primary)	X	Unknown		X	X	
	Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)		X	X	X	Intervention				Only delivered by trained mental health professional	
	Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)		X	X	X	Intervention				Only delivered by trained mental health professional	
	Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) Steps A (9-12)	X				X	Tier 1	X	9-12	X	X
Culture & Climate (Tier 1)	RULER	X				X	Tier 1	X	X	X	X
	Mindful Schools	X				X	Tier 1	X		X	
	Restorative Circles	X	X			X	Tier 1 & 2			X	X
	Safe and Supportive Schools	Unknown					N/A				
	ASPIRE	Unknown					N/A				
Curriculum (Tier 1)	Open Circle (primary)	X				X	Tier 1	X	K-5	X	X
	Second Step (primary)	X					Tier 1	X	PK-8	X	Available, not required
	Whole Child Lessons	This is a philosophy rather than a resource					N/A				
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Response to Intervention	Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS)	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
	Pyramid Model (PK only)	X	X	X	Extensions	Primary	X	X		X	X
	Social Thinking		X	X			Intervention	X	X	X	Available, not required
	Zones of Regulation (primary)	X	X				Intervention	X	X	X	Available
	Playworks	X				X	Tier 1	X		X	Delivered by Playworks Staff
	MindUP	X				X	Tier 1	X	X	X	
	Responsive Classroom (K-5)	X				X	Tier 1	X		X	X

SEL Curricular Implementation at APS

Currently, APS implements two distinct SEL approaches in their schools: Second Step in the primary grades and RULER at the secondary level. Both programs offer classroom curriculum and online supports for educators. RULER and Second Step have also been designated as [CASEL SElect programs](#) by CASEL. Below, we provide more insight into these two programs:

SECOND STEP

[Second Step](#) is a program of the Committee for Children, a Seattle-based non-profit organization. Initially a primary-school approach, Second Step has expanded to include both preschool and middle school content and is developing content for adults. Second Step is built around four key concepts: skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, and problem-solving. The Second Step Suite, including the SEL units, bullying prevention unit, and child protection unit, provides a fully integrated framework for protecting elementary school students and promoting their social, emotional, and academic success.

Second Step provides SEL instruction via 30-minute scripted lessons and videos designed to be taught 2-3 times per week. The units develop students' skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, friendship skills, and problem-solving. The program contains separate sets of lessons for prekindergarten through eighth grade implemented across 22 to 28 weeks each year. Second Step also includes optional additions for Early Childhood-Grade 5 on bullying prevention and child protection. The [child protection unit](#) focuses on safety and helping students to "recognize, report, and refuse unsafe situations."

A 2017 study of Second Step for Early Learning (SSEL) programs found especially encouraging outcomes related to children's executive functioning, which is believed to have a strong relationship with children's social and emotional skills. Researchers found that being enrolled in both Head Start and community preschools had a significant influence on preschoolers' executive functioning skills (i.e., "attention and engagement, thinking ahead and thinking back, think time, encouraging participation, specific reinforcements, and overall attentiveness,") regardless of age, race, ethnicity, family income, and gender (Upshur, Heyward & Wenz-Gross, 2017, p. 21). While this study found less significant gains in social and emotional skills than in executive functioning, it did show a positive influence on participants' pro-social problem solving (Upshur, Heyward & Wenz-Gross, 2017, p. 23).

At the elementary level, Second Step has been found to improve students' social competence, perspective-taking, and problem-solving (Taub, 2002). A more recent study found that children enrolled in Second Step showed improvements in "conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems, pro-social skills, SEL skills, skills for learning, emotion management, and problem solving," (Low, Cook, Smolkowski & Buntain-Ricklefs, 2014, p. 474). This finding suggests that while Second Step is a Tier 1 intervention, it can help students who need more support with regulating emotions, behavior, and interpersonal communication. An additional study at the elementary level also found that Second Step led to a decrease in aggressive behaviors among students whose behavior was considered challenging, (Neace & Munoz, 2014).

Second Step's relatively simple implementation is likely part of its success and prominence in primary grades. Once the school has access to the classroom materials, there is relatively little burden on the district. There is no additional cost for materials and supplies, no professional development requirement, and the lessons stand alone and do not require integration into the current curriculum.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES WITH SECOND STEP IMPLEMENTATION

Scripted, Stand Alone Curriculum

Second Step lessons are scripted with content intentionally designed to stand alone. There is no integration into the existing curriculum, making Second Step lessons challenging to infuse into student learning opportunities. While this requires minor prep for teachers, it gives teachers little agency and fewer opportunities to engage with the material or to differentiate for their students, which results in content that is potentially not student-centered.

No Mandatory Training for Adults

There is no mandatory training for adults; however, optional in-person training, on-demand-webinars, and adult learning elements are woven into student-facing materials. The lack of dedicated professional development may limit the impact of the approach. Teacher-focused approaches that cultivate adult SEL have shown to improve educators' emotional regulation, psychological distress, anxiety, depression, and burnout (Simmons, Brackett, & Alder, 2018). Educator SEL is critical to successful SEL interventions with children (Committee for Children, 2020). Adults in the school building need to be involved in creating a systemic and holistic approach (Brackett, Bailey, Hoffman, Simmons, 2019), to provide modeling for students (Committee for Children, 2020), and to build stronger, supportive relationships (Zakrzewski, 2014). Furthermore, the emotion contagion theory suggests that if teachers are stressed, students are stressed (Burgess, Riddell, Fancourt & Murayama, 2018). If teachers have the skills to manage their stress and burnout, they can better support students.

One Size Fits All Approach

Second Step curricular content has a "one size fits all" design. Specifically, student and community needs are not accounted for in the design of lessons and units, which runs the risk of the curriculum not being student-centered or culturally responsive. It is up to APS educators to do the necessary work to enhance Second Step lessons to make them relevant for their students and relevant to their contents and culture. Research has indicated that contextual factors, students' values and beliefs, and their perception of a skill's efficacy in a real-life situation contributed to their willingness to use the skill in real life. Critically, "student's cultural values and beliefs about emotion expression and social interaction, along with exposure to racism, prejudice, and violence...affect whether and how a student will use SEL Skills" (Zarzewski, 2016, p. 2).

Lack of Systemic Approach

Second Step makes professional development available to educators, but it is not mandatory for program implementation. The program focuses on directly teaching skills to students. While there is an emphasis on returning to the lesson concepts to enforce and bolster them throughout the week, Second Step's primary point of intervention is in the classroom, which leaves a potential gap in school-wide practices and the role of non-teaching staff. As mentioned earlier, research shows that engagement is an essential component of SEL outcomes for children (Committee for Children, 2020; Brackett, Bailey, Hoffman, & Simmons, 2019; Zakrzewski, 2014). APS must consider how to share language, practices, and perspectives across all adult stakeholders within each school to ensure children have a consistent school experience.

Diversity, Equity, and Belonging

Second Step devotes a page on its website to "[Anti-Racism and Anti-Bias Resources](#)," where they express a commitment to "addressing racial injustice and helping you drive real change in

your school communities.” The page offers a list of links for administrators, educators, and student-facing resources developed by [The Committee for Children](#), Second Step’s parent organization, which include alignment with the [Learning for Justice Social Justice Standards](#). Currently, anti-racist practices are not endemic to Second Step’s curriculum. Although Second Step lists valuable resources for APS educators endeavoring to create genuinely transformative, anti-racist SEL, the educators themselves are responsible for integrating anti-racist practices into their SEL curriculum.

RULER

RULER is a research-based approach for integrating social and emotional learning into schools developed and housed at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (YCEI). RULER develops emotional intelligence in all adults involved in a student’s education: school administrators, teachers, and support staff, as well as in all students from preschool to high school and offers companion resources for families and Out of School Time. RULER has two phases. Phase 1 focuses on implementing the four RULER Tools to shift to a more positive climate at schools and teach the five core skills of emotional intelligence: recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating their feelings.

Each RULER Tool is designed for a specific purpose. The Charter is designed to establish a safe emotional climate, the Mood Meter is designed to develop self and social awareness, the Meta-Moment is designed to develop the necessary skills to respond to emotional triggers, and the Blueprint is designed to develop perspective-taking and conflict resolution skills through restorative practice. Phase 2 focuses on incorporating emotional intelligence skills and feeling words in academic content. RULER units and lessons were developed using the [Understanding By Design Framework](#) and align with [CASEL’s Core Competencies](#), [Common Core Standards](#), and SEL Standards (Brackett, Bailey, Hoffman & Simmons, 2019, p. 148).

[Studies on RULER](#) have found that students receiving RULER as an intervention showed improvements in social competence, social problem solving, and emotional literacy when the implementers (teachers) were considered high quality (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, Elbertson & Salovey, 2012). In a 2-year longitudinal study of 5th and 6th-grade classrooms, RULER showed an impact on classrooms’ emotional, instructional and organizational quality (Hagelskamp, Brackett, Rivers & Salovey, 2013). Additionally, a 2019 study conducted by YCEI researchers found increased student engagement both one and two years after the initial intervention (Cipriano, Barnes, Rivers & Brackett, 2019). [RULER’s website](#) also reports improved academic outcomes and relationship quality, but the sources of such claims remain unclear.

RULER relies heavily on an “adults first” mentality and a train-the-trainer model, wherein a small team from each school is trained and asked to train their school faculty and staff. Training can be labor-intensive for the implementation team but is part of RULER’s Theory of Change, which denotes that focusing on adult emotional intelligence allows adults to become agents of change for students (Brackett, Bailey, Hoffman & Simmons, 2019). The systemic approach also creates a holistic and immersive experience for students wherein all adults in the building share the same language, engagement with RULER Tools, and understanding of emotional intelligence skills. Immersed and skilled adults can provide cohesive modeling for students in addition to SEL instruction. Children learn through observation and imitation, and adult’s social and emotional skills shape children’s behaviors even without direct instruction (Committee for Children, 2020).

Ruler for Middle School

RULER for Middle School aims to contextualize students' perception of emotions and emotional intelligence within their understanding of the real world: personally, at school, in their communities, and the world at large. RULER for Middle School contains five units per grade level. These units include four lessons each which total up to 20 lessons per year. Each RULER unit culminates in a content-specific, standards-aligned project, as RULER for Middle School uses project-based learning. There are suggestions for projects across six disciplines: ELA, social studies/history, math, science, digital/fine arts, and physical education.

RULER for High School

As described on their program website, [RULER for High School](#) is "unique and flexible" and does not prescribe a content delivery area. This format provides schools with flexibility of inserting RULER as they see fit but also requires careful consideration and planning. The most likely avenue for content delivery is during advisory. However, if advisory is not available to all students every semester, other delivery pathways to consider are health and wellness, ELA, or other consistent curricular areas. Over the course of four years, the curriculum contains 20 scripted lessons per year, which is accessible to teachers via an online platform and includes slide decks and lesson plans. The curriculum promises students personalized relationship strategies, decision-making skills, insight regarding self-motivation, goal-setting and achievement strategies, and increased emotional vocabulary.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES WITH RULER IMPLEMENTATION

Reliance on train-the-trainer

Unlike Second Step, RULER relies on a train-the-trainer training model. RULER's focus on adult learning is important; however, not all educators in a school building can attend the training, which leaves room for equity problems. For example, how are educators selected to participate in the training? How will the selection of said educators impact the school climate? Additionally, there is often an assumption that the educators who attend the train-the-trainer event will have the power and time to lead the RULER implementation within their building. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. With only a few people responsible for training the entire staff, there is potential that one or all members of the RULER implementation leaves the school, which means all RULER knowledge goes with the person, compromising RULER implementation. RULER's own research indicates the importance of high-quality implementation for student outcomes. APS should take care in ensuring implementation fidelity through evaluation and support teachers in accessing training, coaching, and support (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, Elibertson & Salovey, 2012).

Inconsistencies between RULER for Middle School and High School

The RULER for Middle School curriculum is currently more robust than the high school curriculum. For example, RULER for Middle School uses Project-Based Learning aligned with academic subject areas as a model, whereas RULER for High School does not. The RULER for High School program, which RULER recommends take place during advisory, does not offer examples of how it might be implemented within academic subjects, leaving it to the educator to figure out. Advisories might also make it difficult for consistent implementation, and not all schools use an advisory model. Additionally, there does not seem to be a clear transition from RULER for Middle School to RULER for High School, resulting in little continuity of the robust topics students explore in RULER for Middle School.

One Size Fits All Approach

Much like Second Step, RULER's curriculum is written for a general, grade-specific audience and runs the same risk of not being student-centered or culturally relevant. According to Dr. Dena Simmons, disequilibrium occurs when you tell a student that there is only one right way to do a skill and that method is different from what they do at home (Zakrewzekwski, 2016, p. 3). As we suggest with Second Step, this will require APS educators to ensure that RULER lessons and the implementation and practice of RULER tools are modified to be relevant and affirming to students.

Reliance on RULER Tools

The RULER tools are core elements of RULER's overall approach, professional development training, and student-facing content. The tools are used to teach and practice the RULER skills, and there is a benefit to using the same tools and language across classrooms, schools, and a district. Developmentally appropriate SEL over time is a critical component of holistic and effective SEL (Committee for Children, 2020). Because RULER is not introduced to APS students until they have reached middle school, the benefit of consistent use across context is not as substantial as it would be if they began using the tools in primary grades. Additionally, the Mood Meter, RULER's signature tool, may be perceived by older students as childish and out of alignment with their developmental stage. Finally, using RULER tools abstractly without real-life application may limit students' capacity to employ skills they learn in school across contexts.

Accessibility & Integration

We have concerns about the authenticity and cultural relevance of the high school curriculum, in particular, and further concerns about its applicability in terms of integration into student's schedules. Where does the RULER content fit in a secondary curriculum? It is critical that all students have access to SEL instruction each semester of every school year. However, RULER instruction is only provided in particular content areas (e.g., advisory, health and wellness, or ELA courses). This limitation leaves APS with the challenge of integrating the culture and climate practices that make RULER a systemic approach (i.e., adult development component, school-wide use of RULER tools, family engagement) throughout the school. Moreover, APS will need to determine where the content "lives" and how to maintain students' access to RULER throughout their high school career.

Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging

Similar to Second Step, RULER's website includes a page addressing "[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#)." This [page](#):

1. Declares RULER's "commitment to DEI"
2. Cites content alignment with [Learning for Justice Social Justice Standards](#)
3. Identifies "[RULER for ALL](#)" as an evaluation system aligned with [Universal Design for Learning](#) and [Culturally Relevant Pedagogy](#).

Upon reviewing "[RULER for ALL](#)"'s [website](#), there is no mention or indication of culturally relevant pedagogy. Last, RULER promises the development of adaptations for students "with diverse learning needs" and materials for families in languages other than English. While there is a specific initiative for RULER for All, one might ask: How come such an effort is necessary? Was RULER not for all students before this particular endeavor? Importantly, DEI should be foundational and not reduced to intermittent initiatives. At no point on this [website](#) does RULER provide any resources related to acknowledging or mitigating the impacts of racism, classism, ableism, homophobia/transphobia, sexism, xenophobia, or other forms of oppression. The website and the majority of the current curricular resources on the RULER platform are in English. Because of these gaps, APS staff must modify RULER content with their knowledge

and understanding of institutional and systemic oppression, microaggressions, and individual prejudice and discrimination. On this note, please see our general recommendations section of this report as we offer resources and actionable steps for APS to take to address these gaps.

CROSSWALK BETWEEN RULER AND SECOND STEP

Though we shared some of the below above, it is helpful to have a crosswalk of RULER and Second Step to begin thinking about how APS students will transition from using Second Step in elementary school to RULER in secondary school. Below we have outlined some key similarities and differences that might help with preparing your APS students and educators for the transition:

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN RULER AND SECOND STEP

Social and Emotional Skill Development

Both RULER and Second Step promote the acquisition, practice, and improvement of social and emotional skills by dedicating instructional time to teaching and discussing their respective core components: the skills of emotional intelligence for RULER and learning, empathy, emotion management, and problem-solving for Second Step.

Reinforcing Skill Development Across Settings

RULER and Second Step assert that teaching and learning relevant SEL skills is not limited to the classroom. Both approaches encourage SEL skill reinforcement through continued practice at school and at home. Additionally, both approaches provide educational resources developed specifically for use with families.

Timeline

Both RULER and Second Step view social, emotional, and behavioral development as a continual process that extends across the entire school year and beyond. SEL is not limited to a single unit or month out of the year, but is rather emphasized as a set of skills and competencies for students to be equipped with throughout their time in school and long after they finish.

Academic Content Integration: RULER features a minimally prescriptive approach, encouraging RULER Tool integration into curricular content and classroom procedures. Second Step features a more prescriptive approach, connecting new skills to other areas in the curriculum (e.g., literacy, arts, dramatic arts) and providing a structure for each day of the week.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RULER AND SECOND STEP

Theory and Key Concepts

RULER and Second Step differ in terms of the key concepts that drive each approach's content. RULER is based on emotional intelligence theory with the explicit aim to strengthen students' and staff's emotional intelligence skills. RULER itself is an acronym for the five discrete emotional intelligence skills: recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotion. On the other hand, Second Step is driven by four key concepts: skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, and problem-solving. While Second Step includes emotion management, it is unlike RULER as it does not center emotions. RULER positions emotions as the core from which students can better learn, empathize, and problem-solve, rather than positioning emotions as a separate concept.

Faculty and Staff Involvement

One key difference between RULER and Second Step is the role teachers and staff play in rolling out the approach. Both emphasize the teacher's role in creating time and space to teach social and emotional skills. However, RULER encourages all adult stakeholders within a school to collectively "learn and live" emotional intelligence skills themselves before teaching students. Specifically, RULER recommends that as a precursor to introducing the program to students, school staff should spend the first year incorporating key components and tools into their own routines, rituals, lives, and structures. Second Step focuses exclusively on the skill development of students.

Lesson Plan Structure

Another difference between RULER and Second Step is the structure of each approach's curriculum. Second Step provides 30-minute long, scripted lessons to be delivered 2 to 3 times per week. RULER for Middle School relies on Project-Based Learning. RULER allows for flexibility in teaching RULER content and determining how much time should be spent on each tool. Second Step's lesson plans stand alone as direct instruction. With RULER, teachers are encouraged to incorporate the RULER Tools into academic content to enhance the lesson and behavior management policies. The RULER middle school curriculum provides examples of how to do so. Moreover, high school RULER introduces the RULER Tools during 9th grade, whereas grades 10-12 focus on lessons that address grade-specific content and the science of adolescent learning. Some topics include emotionally intelligent leadership, creativity and flow, personality, and visioning and goal-setting.

Training

RULER employs a "train-the-trainer" model, where school teams of a minimum of three staff members (i.e., teacher, administrator, and service provider/clinical staff member) attend a 2-day training. School teams then learn about emotional intelligence skills and all four RULER tools before developing a plan to turnkey the information to faculty and staff. During the pandemic, RULER has relied solely on virtual learning, which happens over several sessions and two 30-minute in-person Q & As. Included in RULER training is access to online modules to support teaching and learning for training attendees as well as the faculty and staff at their schools. With regards to Second Step, initial training typically lasts one to four hours and is not required.

EXAMPLES OF USING RULER AND SECOND STEP SIMULTANEOUSLY: CLASSROOM APPLICATION

Check-ins and the Mood Meter

Second Step has a process for checking in and checking out, allowing students to build self-awareness and communicate their needs, concerns, and worries. RULER, on the other hand, uses a Mood Meter as part of its check-in routine. Educators can use the Mood Meter to guide and enhance the Second Step check-in since it focuses on building emotional awareness and vocabulary. As a result, strengthening the check-in process can support the transition from Second Step to RULER.

Perspective-Taking and the Blueprint

Under Second Step, students are taught lessons that focus explicitly on perspective-taking. A great way to synthesize and apply students' understanding of different perspectives is to Blueprint interactions and conflict between characters either in a text or in examples provided in the Second Step lesson plans. While the Blueprint is designed to encourage perspective-taking

amidst conflict, it can also be used as a tool to help build literacy skills like identifying cause and effect.

Emotion Management

Both RULER and Second Step emphasize the terms "emotion regulation" and "emotion management," respectively. Second Step's lessons on emotion management may be a great way to incorporate the Mood Meter as an added layer of understanding around regulating emotions. Teachers may encourage students to discuss "emotion management" in terms of shifting into or out of various Mood Meter quadrants. Teachers might also encourage students to discuss regulation strategies that increase or decrease energy or pleasantness.

Managing Intense Emotions

Second Step has lessons across grade levels on managing intense emotions such as anger and "hurt feelings." When discussing various ways to manage intense emotions, teachers may find that introducing or discussing the Meta-Moment is a great way to introduce the significant benefits of breathing in emotion management before strategizing. Students have likely figured out which strategies work for them, and the Meta-Moment is a great way to discuss when and how those strategies are most effective (e.g., when a student is out of the "triggered" or "hot" state).

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this review, we reviewed the following resources: [APS' SEL district plan](#), [SEL Teacher Landscape](#), and [SEL Student Landscape](#), [APS's SEL website](#), and materials shared with us by the District's administration.

After collecting all of APS' SEL resources, the reviewers read through each piece of content first for coherence and to ensure they had access to the shared materials. Besides their experiences as researchers and educators in SEL, the reviewers used the following standards for evaluating the curriculum: [New York University's Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard](#), CASEL's resources on SEL, Massachusetts' Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website [resource](#) on SEL, and the publicly available resources from RULER and Second Step. To ensure consistency throughout the process, each reviewer analyzed the materials independently and later convened to discuss findings. After discussing their findings, the reviewers divided writing up the report for each content area. Each section of the report provides opportunities for educators to enhance existing curricula for SEL and DEB instruction.

FINDINGS

Based on examining the district's curricular materials, APS educators have many resources to support the healthy social, emotional, and academic development of their students. According to the district's plan, the implementation of SEL is at the nascent stage. Given the inconsistencies evident in the 2019-2020 early education audit, it is promising that the district is employing Second Step across elementary schools and RULER in the secondary schools. The hope is that educators, adults, and students in APS will have a common language and consistent SEL-related practices across the district. However, APS will need to support teachers in understanding both RULER and Second Step, especially teachers at the middle school level, who will receive students well-versed in Second Step but implementing RULER. For a seamless

transition from Second Step to RULER, we recommend that middle school teachers engage students' prior knowledge of Second Step to build RULER concepts and knowledge. As such, middle school educators would need the bare minimum of basic training and understanding of Second Step.

Currently, Second Step is being implemented at the preschool level and will also be piloted at a few elementary schools. The High School and Ottoson Middle Schools have just joined the upcoming RULER cohorts and hope to bring the approach to the secondary buildings in the 2021-2022 school year.

The breadth of resources, including mental health, trauma-specific support, interventions for a variety of needs, and the inclusion of mindfulness is especially well done. The district provides many helpful models, tools, and frameworks to support the SEL and equity work. In fact, we identified 18 different models, tools, and frameworks across different tiers of MTSS and RTI systems. We found many additional resources for adults, students, and families. What was unclear from our review of APS materials and online resources was how these fit together, how teachers were to employ these resources, what professional development and implementation supports are available. We also lacked clarity on how teachers know what to use, when to use what, how the various approaches are related, and how student needs are assessed and met?

Narrowing down resources and developing a clear pathway for supporting students' SEL development might ensure systematic consistency across schools. The same can be said for adults, as well. Additionally, we were not able to discern the RTI process and the relationship between MTSS and the various programs. With several interventions being implemented at each tier, there is a need for clarification regarding both purpose and process. Furthermore, APS offers interventions that may give children conflicting, confusing, or contradictory messages. For example, both RULER and Zones of Regulation build skills for emotion regulation and rely heavily on color-coded tools to teach regulation skills. However, each framework assigns different meanings to colors and uses language that is non-identical.

It was not clear from the materials provided how departments and service providers communicate with one another to ensure continuity in a student's experience. Because APS has such a breadth and depth of resources, a collaboration between and amongst departments is also a critical step in building a cohesive and meaningful implementation plan. While teachers are implementing Tier 1 strategies, we presume related service providers, including social workers, counselors, psychologists, speech pathologists, ABA therapists, special educators, and occupational therapists are providing Tier 2 and 3 interventions. When children receive multiple interventions, it is advised that a case manager or individual provider review the totality of interventions used to ensure they are compatible.

Based on the district's plan "to continue the audit and data collection to build upon areas of strength, grow capacity system-wide for integration of SEL instruction as well as explicit instruction, and fund a cohesive SEL program that brings together the students of the district PK-12," we would ensure adult SEL and self and collective care are part of the plan. The need for adult SEL is especially acute in light of the pandemic. Research states that "stress and burnout can impair teacher's instructional effectiveness and classroom climate, and in turn hamper the social-emotional and academic growth of their students," (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009)." Because interpersonal relationships and modeling influence student learning, classroom quality is easily impacted by teacher well-being (La Paro et al., 2009). There is an impressive array of adult-focused resources. However, it is unclear how those resources are being implemented to support educators in the district. Beyond what is present, we recommend [CARE](#)

(Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education) and [SMART-in-Education](#) (Stress Management and Resilience Training).

From the 18 approaches to SEL listed by APS, [Facing History and Ourselves](#) was the only program explicit in both its intention, history, and practice, in a commitment to "stand up to bigotry and hate." While many of the approaches included in the plan have shared statements of commitment to DEB on their websites, there is limited evidence at this time to indicate the impacts they show in creating just, equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist classroom communities. Second Step uses the language of "anti-racism/anti-bias" in support materials available on their website, as does PBIS. RULER uses the language of "diversity, equity, and inclusion." As such, APS must bridge the materials provided with anti-racism and justice-oriented training and practice to ensure SEL does no harm and that all students experience belonging.

Based on APS' request to focus our analysis on Second Step, we will provide greater analysis into the Second Step curriculum shared with us for review.

As APS continues on their SEL journey, we have some recommendations to support an approach for optimal and equitable social, emotional, and academic development (SEAD):

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Collectively identify and agree on who to involve, in what capacities, and with what supports.

- **Include everyone and consider each person working in the school as part of the APS SEL team.**

It is essential to take different stakeholders' perspectives into account as they provide unique and valuable insight on equity gaps they have witnessed or experienced within the school community. This degree of inclusivity builds stronger communities, fosters opportunities for learning between stakeholders (i.e., realizing one another's strengths, capacities, and barriers to accessing most pressing needs), and generates transparency that can help prevent more systemic inequities). Additionally, everyone who interacts with students should receive professional development, especially as it relates to culture and climate and DEB.

- **Create a clear, step-by-step, professional development plan for SEL that includes all departments and roles.**

- Ensure that all educators are:
 - Familiar and competent with the programs they are asked to use.
 - Clear on expectations for program implementation:
 - Frequency of content delivery (dosage and scope and sequence)
 - Integration into classroom instruction and school policies
 - Assessing student outcomes
 - Able to access support and coaching on a consistent basis.
 - Have avenues for collaboration and consultation on supports and needs of individual students in Tier 2 and 3 (through Planning and Placement Team (PPT), Student Support Team (SST), or Response to Intervention (RTI).
- Integrate Culturally Responsive Pedagogy/Anti-Racism training into professional development plans and teacher evaluations.
 - Provide support for teachers in integrating DEB practices into SEL. Specifically, Second Step and RULER are not grounded in cultural responsiveness or anti-racist / anti-bias tenets. Without those elements, SEL can contribute to harm such as [identity erasure](#) and a [lack of belonging](#). For more, please read Dr. Simmons' [Why SEL Alone Isn't Enough](#).
 - Prioritize making DEB-informed SEL an element of professional evaluation and coaching. To support APS with this process, we suggest the following article for shared reading: [Social-Emotional Learning and Equity](#).
 - Update APS' onboarding process to include a professional development plan that supports new staff with implementing DEB and

SEL separately and in tandem.

- **Form a collaborative, multi-stakeholder leadership team.**

Form a team of key stakeholders and collaboratively decide on what each individual is responsible for in terms of SEL implementation and upholding equitable practices with APS systems. We suggest that the future stakeholder leadership team should be comprised of representatives from the following groups:

- Students (i.e., youth leaders)
- Educators
- Caregivers
- Service providers (i.e., school social workers, nurses, nutritionists, and school counselors)
- Support Staff (i.e., administrative assistants, technology support, environmental services, and cafeteria staff)
- Administration
- Out-of-school time partnerships
- Student transportation
- [Arlington Housing Authority](#)

2. Collectively decide on data collection objectives, methods, and assessment tools.

- **Identify data collection goals and objectives using a DEB lens.**

Once APS has formed its multi-stakeholder leadership team, we encourage the team to use a DEB lens to survey faculty, staff, and families to:

- Gauge respective experience, needs, and interests about the implementation of Second Step and RULER.
- Collaboratively plan how to address SEL program gaps (e.g., what information do we need to enhance and adapt our existing SEL curriculum to be inclusive and reflective of our school community's values, cultures, identities, beliefs, and socioeconomic status (SES)?).

- **Choose the way you want to evaluate and monitor SEL program impact at the student and teacher levels.**

SEL Program Impact at the School/Classroom/Student Level:

Evaluating and monitoring SEL program impact are critical elements of RTI to ensure students receive effective interventions and that programs are meeting student and staff needs. At the Tier 1 level, data collection will provide information regarding program efficacy and will allow APS to adjust or reframe programs as needed.

To ensure evaluations align with DEB, we urge APS to consider the following as preliminary steps:

- All data collection and evaluation tools must be vetted for cultural responsiveness and bias, as assessments have historically marginalized

communities of color (Buchanan, Perez, Prinstein & Thurston, 2020). Previous research on the relationship between SEL and increased racial disparities in school discipline found that "colorblind" SEL approaches (i.e., [programs that are "grounded in the norms and expectations of white culture"](#)) are reductive. Such methods unjustly label students' developing SEL skills as deficits without accounting for different aspects of their identity such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status (Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

- Equip teachers and related service providers with appropriate professional development necessary for assessing students' SEL outcomes. We suggest these tools as a way of measuring implementation impact (i.e., ensuring students are successful), not seeking deficits in individual students. At this time, there are no validated tools available to assess RULER outcomes. However, below are a few assessment examples that align with Second Step:
 - Panorama (PK-8)
 - DESSA - Second Step Edition (K-5)
 - DECA (Pre-K)
 - CASEL (PK-12)
- Clarify for teachers how they should be assessing student needs, including the data collection tools they are asked to use, referral procedures, and to whom referrals should be directed, potentially through RTI.

SEL Program Impact at the Teacher Level: Identify evaluation tools to assess faculty staff well-being. APS might consider using Panorama's Teacher Well-being Survey. We encourage APS to use these findings to inform their district's practices.

- **Plan and collect data to assess equity within APS.**

Currently, the APS SEL District Plan admirably features the Building Blocks of Equitable Remote Learning in their SEL District Plan, which includes an insightful line of questioning that guides and challenges districts to move beyond raising awareness about systemic racism (i.e., how are students and families at the margins disproportionately afflicted by the U.S.' mishandling of COVID-19 response?). We recommend that APS' future stakeholder leadership team complete Building Blocks' planning guide on ensuring equitable access. We also ask the district to provide the said team with sufficient and protected time to complete the planning guide together and strategize accordingly.

3. *Use data to inform collaborative decisions about 1) modifying APS' SEL implementation and 2) filling equity gaps.*

- **Modify APS' SEL Implementation as needed.**

- After collecting data on SEL program impact, use the findings to help decide how to minimize or eliminate SEL programs that are not well utilized or impactful. This strategy allows APS to prioritize implementation and support for identified Tier 1 approaches (Second Step and RULER).
- Through a collaboration among providers (PPT, SST, RTI, etc.), identify students receiving multiple interventions and consider whether or not any of

these interventions conflict or clash. Modify accordingly. Use these processes to identify students in need of support and match them with appropriate interventions.

- **Strategize about how to fill equity gaps within APS' infrastructure.**

- The future APS stakeholder leadership team can use their findings from the equity planning guide to help push the district's current SEL critical practices to include more specific directives for educators, school leaders, and community partners to implement.
- Strategize how to address current educational equity gaps adversely impacting the well-being of students, families, educators, and beyond. For example, APS' future stakeholder leadership team can examine the lack of distance learning support tailored for English Language Learners (ELLs) and neurodivergent students. Another opportunity to address existing equity gaps at APS is to examine the district's school disciplinary policies. [APS' 2019-2020 School Safety and Discipline Report](#) shows racial and SES disparities in student discipline, wherein African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and students identified as high-needs are overrepresented and white students are under-represented. That is, these students receive more punitive disciplinary consequences and are removed from instruction more often than their peers who identify as white, non-disabled, and "lower needs." This is especially concerning given the makeup of APS student population:
 - **70%** white and **84%** non-disabled.
 - Only **16%** of APS student population are identified as students with disabilities, yet they account for **53%** of students who received disciplinary consequences.
 - Only **3%** of APS student population are African American/Black students, yet they account for **19%** of students who received disciplinary consequences.
 - Only **9%** of APS student population are identified as economically disadvantaged, yet they account for **28%** of students who received disciplinary consequences.
 - Only **6%** of the APS student population identify as Hispanic/Latino, yet they account for **12%** of students who received disciplinary consequences.
 - Of students referred to law enforcement, none were white or identified as students with disabilities.

Furthermore, the [district's 2019 MCAS scores](#) show glaring gaps in academic achievement also aligned with identity. There is a clear demand for greater focus on meeting the needs of students who experience systemic oppression and the elements of the system that contribute to that oppression.

4. *Connect and sustain learning.*

- Revisit and clarify for educators how existing SEL programs fit together and how they work in combination to support students.
- Create a transition process from Second Step to RULER by providing middle school faculty and staff with a basic understanding of Second Step and student's prior knowledge and consider integrating RULER tools into elementary use.

5. *Implement programs responsibly.*

Ensure that APS' use of restorative practices and circles are not [perpetuating the harm cultural appropriation causes to Native and Indigenous communities](#). The United States Government and its institutions, including schools, have done irreparable harm to Native peoples.

LIMITATIONS

This curriculum analysis did not include school visits, interviews, focus groups, completed student work, or surveys, nor did the reviewers have access to every single piece of academic content or book to which students are exposed. As a result, there are likely gaps in understanding the complete picture of SEL practices at APS. Moreover, this analysis cannot speak to everyday routines, behaviors, interactions, and the teaching and learning that occurs at each school and within classrooms.

Additionally, based on the information provided in [APS' SEL District Plan](#), the implementation of the following programs was not clear, and we are not able to provide meaningful feedback:

- "Circles"
- DBT
- Safe and Supportive Schools
- ASPIRE
- Advisory 6-12
- Mindfulness 6-12

Based on the materials provided to us, we could not discern how APS implements "Circles" and whether or not implementation is framed in Restorative Practices. If so, please consider that [Restorative Practices appropriate much of their foundation and practice from Indigenous communities](#) and can contribute harm to those communities by co-opting their practices.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APS' SEL DISTRICT PLAN

[APS SEL District Plan](#) currently includes four critical practices for equitable reopening listed below, which, in general, demonstrate APS' commitment to strengthening the district's sense of community (i.e., collaboration and partnership-building) and connecting staff with opportunities for emotional healing and professional development (PD). We provide a few recommendations and questions that APS might consider to optimize more equitable implementation of their SEL critical practices:

SEL Critical Practice 1: Take time to cultivate and deepen relationships, build partnerships, and plan for SEL.

- Part of this practice includes strengthening "school/leadership teams" by referring to this helpful [resource](#) from CASEL. Specifically, [CASEL recommends schools form SEL teams](#) and have roles such as school-family partnership lead and student members. When creating SEL-focused teams, we encourage APS to involve representatives from different family structures, socioeconomic status (SES), and family members of exceptional learners in programming decisions (i.e., implementation and content). Such individuals can speak to their communities' different experiences and help inform the ways SEL programs can be modified or adapted to address any needs or challenges impacting historically marginalized communities. Once APS has formed their SEL team, they might consider this [CASEL resource which includes different rubrics for implementing school-wide SEL authentically](#).
- One of the equity planning questions of Critical Practice 1 asks, "Are your team members trained to consider indicators of racism or inequity (such as disproportionality in either risk factors or access to protective factors) when developing social emotional-related action plans for school reopening?" While this is valuable insight, how will APS gauge whether staff and educators are well-trained in anti-racism and equity practices to ensure this practice is met? Moreover, how will APS move beyond "considering indicators of racism or inequity" and towards anti-racist actions? That is, how does APS plan to apply this lens on a systemic level (e.g., are those in charge of student discipline also expected to be well-trained in anti-racism and equity?) to ensure racial justice and equity? Given this, we recommend that APS plan a district-wide training to communicate clear goals and practices related to racial justice and SEL. Because racial justice is both a practice and a viable avenue for SEL development, we also recommend district leaders make the arrangements necessary for educators to receive ongoing support, coaching, and professional development opportunities.

SEL Critical Practice 2: Design opportunities where adults can connect, heal, and build their capacity to support students

- Critical Practice 2 also aims to "identify opportunities for... anti-racist practices," which includes study groups and academic PD. APS' initiative to build staff and educators' understanding of anti-racist practices is commendable as this knowledge is necessary for creating more equitable school communities. With sustaining systemic change in mind, we encourage APS school leaders to identify the goals they aim to accomplish through anti-racist study groups and

academic PD. It is also vital that APS determine what these goals should look like in practice (e.g., [Will discriminative school disciplinary policies be replaced with restorative practices?](#)). We also noticed that [APS' district plan](#) does not specify who will lead anti-racist study groups and academic PD. Without a designated team, APS leaves itself open to the problem of not having anyone take responsibility for leading these groups. On this note, we respectfully caution APS to take care in selecting who will lead anti-racist and anti-bias training. Unfortunately, it has become commonplace within institutions for this work to fall on BIPOC, leaving BIPOC staff unjustly exhausted and emotionally triggered. APS might consider reading one of the many articles written about this last summer such as, ["What is Black Fatigue, and How Can We Protect Employees From It?"](#) and ["Woke-Washing' Your Company Won't Cut It."](#) We also recommend reading ["Give Black Employees Time to Rest and Recover,"](#) which calls for organizations and institutions to look ahead and start being more consistently mindful and supportive of the needs of Black employees. For additional guidance on adopting practices that are more responsive to the needs and experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) staff, we recommend APS leaders and educators read, ["For Black Educators When School Systems Aren't Doing Enuf,"](#) by Dr. Dena Simmons.

SEL Critical Practice 3: *Create safe, supportive, and equitable learning environments that promote all students' social and emotional development.*

- APS importantly includes the creation of “safe, supportive, and equitable” spaces as a critical practice to grow students' SEL skills. Currently, Critical Practice 3 calls on staff and educators to “allocate a structured period of culture-building time as school first opens.” To support this endeavor, we have some recommendations:
 - Consider implementing activities and routines that sustain the impact of culture-building throughout the school day, let alone the school year. For example:
 - Set up opportunities for students to practice their relationship-building skills. Educators can facilitate an activity at the beginning of the school year where students find three people in their class who share an interest that they have.
 - Implement a year-long, school-wide campaign aiming to build “safe, supportive, and equitable” communities and spaces at APS. School leaders might consider posting a monthly feelings prompt that challenges students and teachers to think about what they can do in their classes or at their school to help each other experience and maintain a particular feeling. For example, each month could have an essential question at the intersection of DEB and SEL:
 - **September:** How can we help each other feel safe?
 - **October:** How can we help others feel like we belong?
 - **November:** What can we do to help each other feel understood?

To begin, APS educators and students can explore monthly feelings prompts and as a class, they can submit a creative

project/assignment (e.g., creative writing pieces, PBL projects, art installments, PSA videos, service learning projects) that connects to [social justice](#) (e.g., historically, how have people felt more or less safe/understood/supported as a result of their identity and beliefs?). Additionally, educators might refer to the following resources when creating rubrics to assess student projects using a Diversity, Equity, and Belonging (DEB) lens:

- [The Culturally Responsive-Sustaining STEAM Curriculum Scorecard](#)
- [Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard](#)
- APS plans to conduct in-person and [virtual connection mapping](#) to help strengthen adult-student and peer relationships. These virtual connections are critically important. Research on school connectedness reveals that students are less likely to engage in less risk-taking behavior like substance abuse and unprotected sex (Green, DeFosset & Kuo, 2019). Moreover, studies have found that students who have a trusted relationship with at least one adult at school are more resilient and a stronger sense of well-being (Meltzer et al., 2016; Bellis et al., 2017). In sum, relationships are invaluable to students' social awareness and relationship-building skills. Given the importance of relationships, we share some resources as you continue to build connections in your community:
 - Much of the media reports on pandemic pedagogy have found that students with exceptional needs are not being fully served (Sugarman & Lazarín, 2020; Jackson & Bowdon, 2020). To support your work in building connections with your exceptional learners, we provide additional resources below:
 - [“Bridging Distance for Learners with Special Needs”](#)
 - [Resources to Support Students with Disabilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
 - [Supporting English Language Learners \(ELLs\) with Distance Learning](#)
 - Outside of the above resources for building connections, here are a few recommendations:
 - Devise a plan for reaching hard-to-reach families and consider forms of outreach to reconnect with any lost families as a result of the pandemic.
 - Invite adult colleagues for check-ins to build community among each other.
 - Designate time for connecting with students at least twice a month during remote and hybrid learning.

SEL Critical Practice 4: Use data as an opportunity to share power, deepen relationships, and continuously improve support for students, families, and staff.

- Critical Practice 4 lists [essential planning questions for APS to ensure equitable data collection, analyses, and response to findings](#) (e.g., Are we regularly disaggregating our data [by race, gender, disability status, etc.] to determine whether specific student groups are being disciplined more frequently than others or experiencing disproportionate consequences for the same violations? Will the new behavioral expectations and consequences disproportionately impact specific student groups?). APS might also ask themselves about how they plan

to align with DEB if their data reveal harmful and discriminatory practices? Who will oversee the amendments of such practices, and what steps will APS take to prevent injustice and racism? To begin, we recommend APS reassess their existing school policies and grading requirements by using the resources we provide below as guiding posts for identifying any harmful practices that further disadvantage students at the margins. Within the following resources, APS will find 1) actionable steps to make systemic changes tailored for historically marginalized student populations, 2) recommendations on stakeholders to involve and oversee such changes to ultimately recreate safer, culturally responsive, and identity-affirming learning spaces.

- [Actionable Strategies to Eliminate School Discipline Inequities \(Real Talk for Real Change\)](#)
- [Addressing Inequities in Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic: How Education Policy and Schools Can Support Historically and Currently Marginalized Children and Youth](#)
 - [Indigenous Children and Youth](#)
 - [Asian-American Children and Youth](#)
 - [Black Children and Youth](#)
 - [Latinx Children and Youth](#)
 - [LGBTQ+ Children and Youth](#)
- [Respect for All - Policy Recommendations to Support LGBTQ+ Students \(GLSEN\)](#)

SEL AND DEB RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACADEMIC CONTENT

Resource: [Remote Class Meeting Guide- Activities](#)

- The [Remote Class Meeting Guide](#) highlights the importance of meeting students' basic needs first and encourages educators to consider students' increased exposure to trauma, stress, and anxiety during distance learning. Currently, the guide states that "educators can be an important buffer against trauma" but does not specify the ways educators can serve as a protective agent to students triggered by trauma and high-stress situations. To enhance APS' responsiveness to students' needs, we provide supplemental resources below centered on guiding educators in helping their students cope with traumatic experiences: COVID-19 pandemic and school closures:
 - [Supporting Students Experiencing Trauma During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
 - [Maintaining Connections, Reducing Anxiety While School is Closed](#)
 - [National Child Traumatic Stress Network Resources](#) *Grouped by type of trauma
- It is important to consider that schools address the trauma of racism as well. As Dr. Simmons wrote in her *Educational Leadership* [article](#), "Healing Black Students' Pain," "Indeed, our trauma work must include not only addressing the toxic stress of racism, which we know contributes to adverse mental and physical health effects in people of color (Comas-Díaz & Hall, 2019; Williams, 1999), but also confronting the dangers of white privilege." Racial trauma work is just as necessary for white children because the ignorance and bias that feeds racism, which originates from the acceptance of white supremacy, inflict harm, too."
- Additionally, while it is crucial to equip educators and school staff with strategies for providing specialized support to students with trauma and anxiety, it is imperative for

districts to adjust school policies and expectations to be more responsive to educators and school staff's wellness. For example, APS can establish systems such as ["tap-in/tap-outs"](#) (i.e., teachers can text a colleague to relieve them from teaching for a few minutes to take a breathing break and recenter themselves). The district can also revise school schedules to give teachers sufficient time for planning, reflection, rest, and PD (e.g., [blocking out time for collaborative planning among educators while students complete enrichment activities](#)). As APS continues to adopt more equitable practices, we encourage APS district leaders to review the recently published resources below to help inform APS' equity action planning. These resources include: 1) actionable steps districts can take to support educators and school staff better and 2) policy recommendations from school social workers. These particular policy briefs below address highly pressing concerns regarding school reopenings and the detrimental repercussions of increased racialized police brutality, which have disproportionately harmed BIPOC students and communities:

- [Supporting Teacher and Staff Mental Health and Well-being \(Center for Disease Control\)](#)
 - ["As Teacher Morale Hits a New Low, Schools Look for Ways to Give Breaks, Restoration"](#)
 - [Opening Schools Safely in the COVID-19 Era: School Social Workers' Experiences and Recommendations](#)
 - [School Reopening Priorities and Guidance during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- The Second Step [remote meeting guide](#) identified three ways to engage with students during school closures (p. 4). Second Step suggests that mixing all three methods contributes to a class' success. To help APS align more closely with DEB practices, we include a few recommendations below for each type of delivery method:
 - [Synchronous Activities](#): Virtual synchronous activities include live class meetings intended to simulate a regular school experience. The [section on synchronous activities](#) states that students with a greater need for social and emotional connections may also face more difficult barriers to attend live class sessions. This [section](#) further instructs teachers to "make sure students also have opportunities to build relationships with staff and peers through other means," but it does not provide examples on how to do so. In light of this, APS educators might consider the recommendations we previously noted for SEL Critical Practice 3 (page #) in addition to the following resources:
 - ["7 Ways to Maintain Relationships During Your School Closure"](#)
 - [Building Better Relationships With Parents at the Classroom, School, and District Level](#)

Implementing some of the strategies included in the above articles will help students nurture their self and social-awareness skills which are essential for relationship-building. For example, [assigning students to check-in with one classmate a day and relaying updates to their teacher](#) positions students to examine their own emotions, activate their listening and responsible decision-making skills, and engage in perspective-taking. We ask APS educators to be mindful of how they pair students to ensure that all students have the opportunity to meet everyone in their class. It is also important for educators to check in with students themselves to gauge how students are fairing.