



Press Release

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State Focuses on Student Wellness with Social Emotional Learning Day

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LANSING – The mental health and social and emotional learning (SEL) of Michigan students and educators are vital to children’s education and to student wellbeing. While always important, they have become more ostensibly so during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE).

Governor Gretchen Whitmer recognizes the importance of SEL with her proclamation designating March 26, 2021 as Social Emotional Learning Day in Michigan. At the same time, it is international SEL Day, a double effort to bring attention to the social emotional and mental health needs of young people and the supportive environments that schools can provide to help students feel emotionally and physically safe.

“Educators are among the most critical sources of connection, education, and support for children,” said State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice. “During the pandemic, these valuable relationships between educators and children have been disrupted, which has led to some children and families becoming more isolated, vulnerable, and in need of support.

“Through SEL, school staff are able to engage children and families to provide the connections that are so profoundly needed,” Dr. Rice said.

MDE, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, the Michigan Association of School Social Workers, the Michigan School Counselor Association, and the Michigan Association of School Psychologists affirm the need for SEL as a foundational support to schools, families, and children.

The State Board of Education and MDE have included student health, safety, and wellness as a goal in the state’s strategic education plan.

There is a wide range of experiences with SEL across the state that include the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) five competencies of student self-awareness, awareness of others, self-management, relationship to others, and decision-making.

Dr. Rice explained that Michigan educators have long understood the value of working in the social and emotional learning space.

“That said, everything in this space is not SEL as defined by CASEL,” Dr. Rice noted. “We must continue to learn more to help our children work through their social, emotional, and mental health challenges and to help them excel in school and in life.”

With these important ideas in mind, MDE is encouraging teachers and administrators in school buildings across Michigan to partner in MDE’s *Children Matter. You Matter. Learn SEL!* effort. A free course in SEL is being offered through Michigan Virtual, and MDE has asked that a building leader and at least two to four teachers from every school complete the two-hour training.

This professional development encouragement is an effort of the state’s SEL/Children’s Mental Health Network, comprised of educators and mental health professionals and started by the department last fall.

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