

K-5 Social Emotional Wellness

Remote Learning Task Force Expert Advisory Panel 2: Support to Address the Whole Child Experience, Minutes, 7/28/20

Attendance – Lindsay, Hiroko, Sanjli, Bryan, Amanda T, Beth, Amanda G, Ellen, Lauren, Mariah, Susan, Maria

Approval of Minutes – Lindsay, Hiroko, Bryan, Sanjli, Amanda T, Beth, Amanda G, Ellen

Discussion

Amanda T – Email from parent whose child learned remotely due to medical needs in a prior year and was isolated and excluded. Concerns about how to make sure children learning fully remotely remain connected to and included in their in-school community. Important to think ahead to the time when remote students will re-enter in-school environment and keep those connections strong, have a sense of community for all students in a class whether they are in-person or remote instead of having completely separate, parallel tracks.

Lauren – One key strategy for this could be pen pals, with one child in-school paired with a child learning remotely, this would be a good way to help maintain connections

Amanda G – This is really important to build connections for kids learning from home, pen pals a great idea. Also Zooms with the live classroom, remote community activities, remote & in-person study buddies.

Bryan – We need check in points to assess how remote students are doing and be able to pivot and make changes

Maria – Wellness screening as an opportunity for check-in. All schools and principals are prioritizing the need for community building.

Bryan - The probability is higher for students who are remote to feel isolated or need help with such a large number of students undertaking this unexplored area.

Sanjli - It'll be especially important for parents to find a way to connect and share on behalf of their children as well. Processing together can really help with community building.

Presentation: Social-Emotional Wellness, K-5: Lindsay, Amanda T, Amanda G

Amanda T: We can't ask too much of students for their age in terms of emotion regulation and executive function, these abilities develop slowly across childhood as the brain develops. When students are stressed, their emotion regulation and executive function regress and "hot" cognition takes over, so they will function like younger children. There are high emotion regulation demands of both remote and in-school socially distanced learning. For young children, the strategies that would normally be used to help them regulate e.g. kneeling down face-to-face beside them, hugs, etc. won't be possible with social distancing so it will be harder for them to manage their emotions. When students are stressed and

become emotionally dysregulated, they won't follow safety procedures and both their learning and the learning of their classmates will be disrupted. So both safety/health of the school environment and academic effectiveness depend on emotion regulation of the student body.

Lindsay: Don't start a lot of new initiatives that have no history in PSB. As much as possible, leverage what we have, map needs to existing systems. Valuable to sit down with a representative team to discuss what we already have available and how to apply it. Critical to have someone at district level driving this with a coordinated service delivery model, team that meets regularly at the district level, resources invested in this process for it to be effective.

- Items on traditional universal screeners are not written for the COVID situation, may need to be adapted. Multi-informant approach needed.
- We need to think about behavioral indicators of need for screening or additional supports – can't rely only on traditional measures like attendance, nurse visits, etc. Need to set other benchmarks.
- Focus needs to be on universal supports given to all students, not only putting out fires. This will give the biggest bang for your buck.

Amanda G: Recommends soft opening of schools for first month or so, focus on SEL skills. Incorporation of mindfulness practices in the classroom and training more teachers to be able to do this. Self-care for teachers. Mindfulness helps students be in the moment and ready to learn, not worried about past or future, reduces anxiety, improves academics.

Discussion

Beth – developed a mindfulness training, can be a resource on this

Big picture questions – Mariah:

- (1) 20% of kids typically need intervention, and we can expect to double or triple that. If we're facing a mental health deluge, how do we plan and staff for that?
- (2) At school committee, heard presentation of families doing daily self-check of health symptoms. Regular & socioemotional learning are on a spectrum and feed each other, could daily check-in have a socioemotional element? Also ask teachers how they're feeling on a regular basis.

Maria: we have been thinking about how to address needs with the capacity we have, and thinking about team members' load and self-care as well. Developing road map for educators to find relatively simple things they can incorporate into their classrooms, in addition to how to obtain more support about Tier 1 when needed.

Susan – the panel needs to understand what questions the district is asking. It would be good for panel to be answering questions from the district.

Key Points

1. It's important to **build connections for students**, particularly for youth participating exclusively in remote learning. Potential strategies include pairing remote learning students with students

who may be attending school in-person (e.g., via hybrid model) and write to each other (e.g., pen pals) or arrange virtual meet-ups.

2. It's important to **build connections for families**, particularly for families engaged in remote learning. It may be helpful for caregivers to have avenues and/or opportunities to process complex emotions as a community.
3. We can't ask too much of students for their age in terms of **emotion regulation and executive function**, these abilities develop slowly across childhood as the brain develops. When students are stressed, their emotion regulation and executive function regress and "hot" cognition takes over, so they will function like younger children. There are high emotion regulation demands of both remote and in-school socially distanced learning. **Consider supports and strategies to prioritize emotion regulation** as this will then allow for an environment with greater health/safety and academic progress.
4. A **coordinated, multi-tiered approach** can be reflexive and responsive to all students amidst the pandemic. Prioritize universal supports that will benefit all youth. It's more efficient and can reduce the number of individual student plans needed. Ideas would be daily (or weekly) community check ins, social skills instruction, collaboratively developing routines and expectations, etc.
5. To identify students who need more support, consider a **multi-informant method**. This means teacher, parent, student nomination, behavioral indicators (e.g., attendance in Zoom meetings) and perhaps universal screening. If a universal screener is used, it will be helpful to have a version that allows for **parent and student response** as teachers may not have as much information about the student as they typically would in the beginning of the school year.
6. **For first month or so, focus on SEL skills in the "classroom"**. Prioritize the incorporation of mindfulness practices and training more teachers to be able to do this.
7. Explicitly consider how to provide opportunities for **self-care for teachers**. Mindfulness helps be in the moment and (for students) be ready to learn, not worried about past or future, reduces anxiety, and improves academics.