

NOAH WEBSTER EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION MODEL POLICY

TO: TBD
FROM: Noah Webster Educational Foundation
RE: Thorough Evaluation of SEL Programs Before Implementation
DATE: TBD

This model policy seeks to improve the quality of social-emotional learning (SEL) programs in schools by clarifying the roles, procedures, and standards for evaluating SEL programs. These roles, procedures, and standards should be used when adding a new program to the curriculum or performing a periodical review of current programs.

Thorough Evaluation of Social-Emotional Learning Programs Before Implementation

AUTHORS:

- Noah Webster Educational Foundation

BACKGROUND: School Districts are provided funding to offer mental health services to students; however, the programs being implemented can negatively impact student well-being if they are not thoroughly evaluated. This policy aims to help school boards better assess and implement social-emotional learning (SEL) programs in accordance with legal requirements and guidance from practicing mental health professionals. This model policy directly corresponds to NWEF's 'Navigating Mental Health K-12,' specifically, Session Five, [‘The Mission to Protect and Educate!’](#)

LEGAL ADVISORY: This model policy was written based on research and guidance from mental health professionals and policy analysts. Noah Webster Educational Foundation is not a law firm, nor does it claim any legal expertise. Please consult with your school district's attorney and state laws and codes when evaluating model policies from Noah Webster Educational Foundation.

Subject: Thorough Review of SEL Programs Before Implementation

I. Description of Policy

This School Board/School Division, as required by the state and federal government for the health and education of students, uses a portion of its budget to fund social-emotional learning (SEL) programs in its schools. This policy outlines the appropriate procedures and content for SEL programs, adhering to federal regulations and professional recommendations. It affirms the responsibility of school boards to review SEL programs before their implementation.

A. School boards have an obligation to confirm that all programs instituted as part of the district curriculum are of the highest standard and are beneficial to the students within their district.

B. While evaluating social-emotional learning programs, school board members should be mindful of federal, state, and local policies on the content of programs, specifically, *Executive Order 14190* and the *American Rescue Plan Act*.¹

II. Responsibility of School Boards

The purpose of schools within the **[schoolboard district]** is to ensure that all students receive high-quality instruction. As such, the **[schoolboard district]** will take steps to thoroughly review these programs by designating a school board member or committee that has been appropriately trained to thoroughly review and evaluate the contents of all SEL programs. This individual or committee will be responsible for ensuring that the SEL programs being considered or reviewed for implementation meet the legal and professionally recommended standards.

III. Attributes of Appropriate Social-Emotional Learning Programs

School board members should ensure a clear set of standards is used when reviewing social-emotional learning programs. As recommended by qualified professionals in the mental health field, all social-emotional learning programs should meet the following standards:

A. Must ensure that parents/guardians are informed of the eight categories protected by the *Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA)*², make programs available for parental feedback

¹ The full text for the American Rescue Plan Act can be found here: [P.L. 117-2: American Rescue Plan Act of 2021](#).

² The eight protected categories under the PPRA are political affiliations and beliefs of students and parents, mental or psychological problems of students and parents, sex behaviors and attitudes of students and parents, illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating, or demeaning behavior, critical appraisals of other individuals with whom respondents have close family relationships, legally recognized privileges or analogous relationships (lawyers, physicians, ministers), religious practices, affiliations, or beliefs, income (other than that required by law to determine eligibility for participation in a program for receiving financial assistance under such programs). While the PPRA only requires that parents be notified of these eight categories when administering a survey, it is best practice to involve parents with these issues in all circumstances regarding mental health. A parent's right to be informed, involved, and to opt out of several of these categories relating to moral and religious upbringing was also recently established and upheld in the Supreme Court Case *Mahmoud v. Taylor*.

at the beginning of the implementation process, and promote patriotic values as outlined in *Executive Order 14190*.³

B. Must be evidence-based using all available scientific evidence to support student well-being.⁴

C. Must be non-biased and refrain from imposing any ideologies on students, including those related to political affiliations and sex behaviors/attitudes.

School board members should develop clearer and more specific standards for reviewing how SEL programs are taught once they are added to the curriculum. All SEL programs should only be taught by mental health professionals who are trained, qualified, and employed by the school to do so.⁵

IV. Maintenance of Records

All information and records of social/emotional counseling are to be kept confidential and separate from the student's educational records and may not be disclosed to any third party without prior written parental/guardian consent or as otherwise provided by law.

³ The full text for referencing Executive Order 14190 can be found online at the Federal Register by clicking this link: [Executive Order 14190](#). Full definitions and tenants of this proclamation can be referred to using the text provided in this link.

⁴ Pub. L. No. 117-2, Title II, Subtitle A, Part 1, § 2001, 135 Stat. 4, 21 (2021).

⁵ The mental health professionals who advised these standards can be referenced using Noah Webster Educational Foundation's training series 'Navigating Mental Health K-12,' which can be found here: [Session Five: 'The Mission to Protect and Educate!'](#).