

MEMORANDUM

To: Leah Voorhies, Assistant Superintendent of Student Support, and the Utah State Board of Education (USBE)

From: Utah Special Education Advisory Panel (Panel)

Subject: Social Emotional Learning and Students with Disabilities

Date: March 20, 2020

In our role as an advisory panel to the USBE, we would like to provide input and recommendations to the Special Education Services section of the USBE to improve services for students with disabilities through Social Emotional Learning.

Students with disabilities are disproportionately affected by mental health issues. But, because of the nature of their disability, they often have difficulty accessing instruction and resources for healthy social emotional learning (SEL). Meeting the needs of all students would require whole school coordination to assure that all students have access to social emotional learning in the least restrictive environment.

The following are the USEAP's recommendations to the USBE relating to social emotional learning practices:

- 1) Provide supports to LEAs to implement evidence-based multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) in trauma informed SEL. LEAs must be prepared to provide access to the curriculum for children with disabilities on each tier of the system.
- 2) One promising practice observed in an LEA in Utah includes the use of wellness rooms as a tier one resource for emotional regulation. Students self-select to go to the room; they are not sent there by teachers or anyone else. All students at the school can access the wellness room, it is not exclusively for special education students. In the room, the mental health professionals and/or paraeducators support the student's emotional regulation through instruction and support. Each school should be encouraged to set up their own wellness room under the guidance of an occupational therapist and/or a mental health professional.
- 3) Other practices that should be included in an MTTs for SEL include:
 - a) Meditation and mindfulness activities for all students on a regular basis
 - b) Consistent language used within a school when discussing social emotional learning
 - c) Training for all teachers in social emotional learning and in trauma informed care
 - d) Training for all teachers in emotional regulation to help them understand how to coach and support students in their zones of regulation
 - e) Training for skills coaches/behavior aides to help support teachers and to enable students with disabilities to be served in the least restrictive environment
 - f) Training for LEA mental health professionals in working with students with complex disabilities.

- 4) In general, across the state there are areas of high class sizes, including as high as over 35 students in an elementary class. These large class sizes are prohibitive of an educator's capacity to support the social emotional learning needs of students. We advise that USBE take class sizes into consideration when supporting LEAs to implement MTSS for SEL
- 5) Finally, we would like to re-emphasize our advice that students with more complex needs and significant disabilities have access to instruction in SEL and inclusion in the school community implementation of MTSS for SEL. With implementation of alternative standards and alternative assessments, LEAs are always held accountable for ensuring access to the Utah Core Standards outside of Mathematics, English/Language Arts and the Extended Science Core. Yet, the **IDEA** requires that students with disabilities have **access** to the same **curriculum** (according to their individualized needs) as students without disabilities. Access to SEL by students with disabilities is just as important to their long-term outcomes as math and ELA.

Thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing these recommendations. We as a Panel appreciate all of your efforts on behalf of children with disabilities throughout the State of Utah.