



# Supporting Student Social Emotional Needs in Today's Schools

NJSBA Workshop, October 26, 2022

# Presenters

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# Presentation Outline

- Introduction to Sustainable Jersey for Schools and connection to Social Emotional Learning
- Overview of pandemic-era SEL issues in schools
- SJS School Culture & Climate actions as framework for creating school environments that set everyone up to thrive –
  - data-driven approaches;
  - school-wide integration of climate, culture and inclusion
  - School examples from Sustainable Jersey for Schools

# Sustainable Jersey for Schools

A free, voluntary program that provides tools, training, and grants to New Jersey public schools to help them implement sustainability initiatives and achieve certification.



- Identifies **actions** to become more sustainable
- Provides **tools, resources, and guidance** to make progress
- Provides access to **grants** for schools and school districts
- Recognizes **accomplishments**
- Awards certification to individual schools but requires School Board and district level support



# Statistics

2014  
Program  
Started

64%  
Districts  
Participating

1,058  
Schools  
Registered



306  
Certified



48  
Certified



43 Digital  
Schools  
Stars

7,861  
Actions  
Implemented



Statistics current as of 10/5/22





# Three School Climate Actions

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- Inclusive Environments Where All Can Thrive
- School Culture and Climate Needs Assessment
- Social Emotional Integrated Unit



# The Big Question

How do we create school environments that set-up all kids for success in school and life?



*It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults (“men”) – Frederick Douglass*





# Mental Health of Students & Staff

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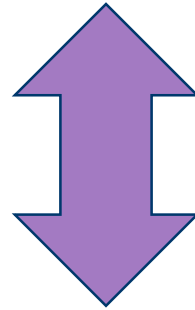
- More than 1 in 3 high school students had experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in 2019, a 40% increase since 2009. This rose again to 2 in 5 in 2021.
- In 2019, approximately 1 in 6 youth reported making a suicide plan in the past year, a 44% increase since 2009 (CDC.gov). This rose to 1 in 5 in 2021 and 1 in 10 attempting suicide.
- Rate of children age 5-11 years having mental health related visits to ER increased approx. 24% from 2019 to 2020 (CDC-) and 12-17 year olds 31%.
- Students who said they felt close to people in the school were less likely to report poor mental health. However, Asian & Black students reported experiencing racism, felt less connected, and reported poorer mental health.
- About 1 in 4 teachers said they were experiencing symptoms of depression in an early 2021 survey by the RAND Corp. In a separate survey, RAND also found that most secondary school principals were experiencing frequent job-related stress—and one of their big stressors was supporting teachers' mental health and well-being.

# The Foundation

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The **social-emotional skills** of students and staff create the foundation for a positive school climate.

*Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion*

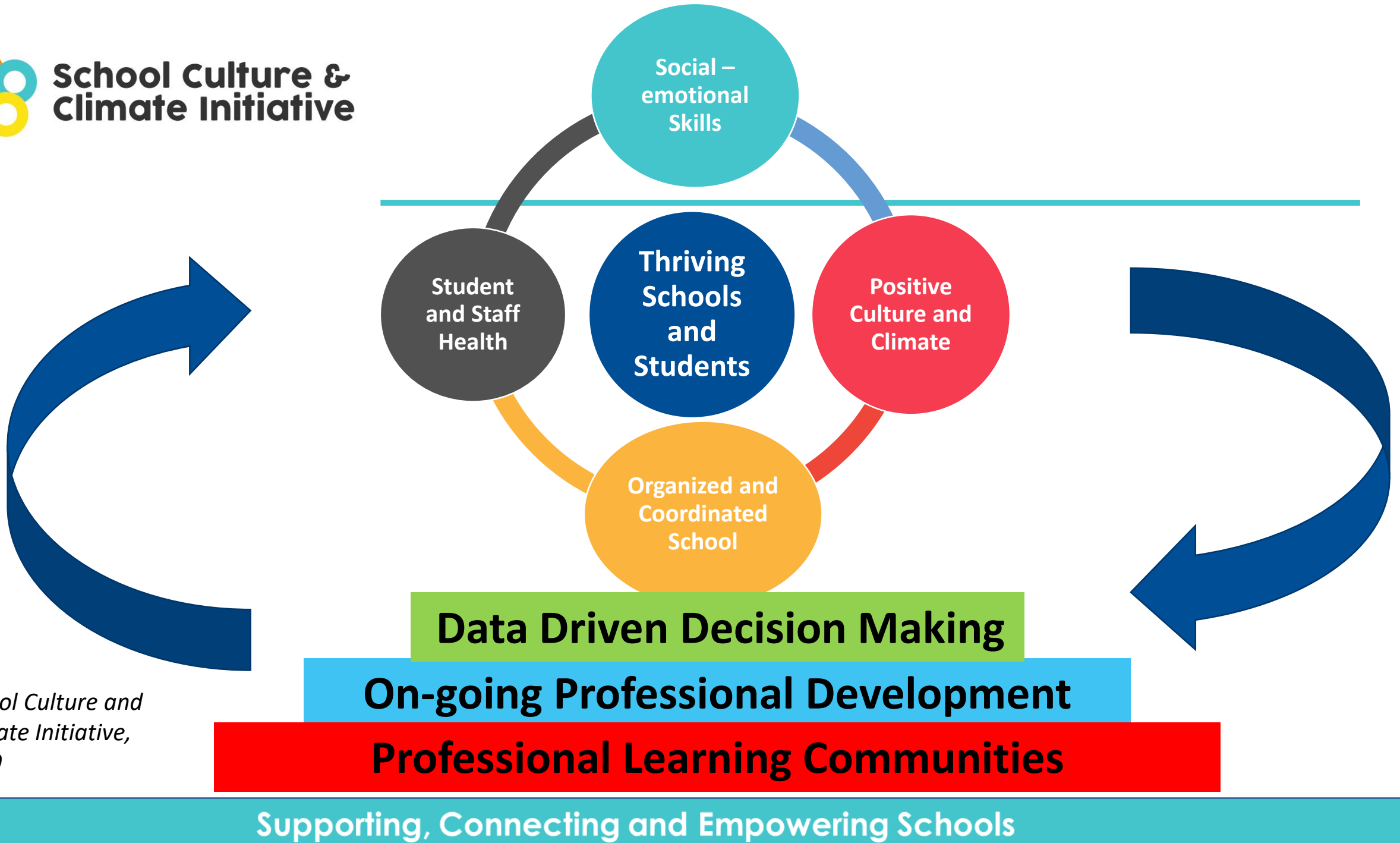


*Trauma-Informed Practices*

In a positive **school climate** teaching and learning can happen and all are respected, heard, valued and supported.



# School Culture & Climate Initiative



*School Culture and Climate Initiative, 2019*



# How to Support Student's Social-emotional Needs

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Create a positive school culture based on a **shared set of core values**

- **Assess** and improve school climate
- Create an **equitable and inclusive school community**
- Intentionally **infuse students' social-emotional and life skills learning outcomes in the curriculum**

*Support staff and students' social-emotional well-being*

# So why these three actions?

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## Keys for sustainable impact

- **Data driven approach important**
  - *School Climate Needs Assessment*
- **ALL students need to feel connection and belonging**
  - *Inclusive Environments Where All Can Thrive*
- **Integrated SEL.. walk the talk in all aspects of school life**
  - *Social Emotional Integrated Unit*

### ACTIONS

1. School Culture and Climate Needs Assessment
2. Inclusive Environments Where All Can Thrive
3. Social Emotional Integrated Unit

## Action - *School Culture and Climate Needs Assessment*

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- Cultivate **social trust** and build trust in the climate improvement process first
- Incorporate **student, staff, and parent voice** in the process
- Collect school climate survey **data** from all key stakeholders
- Triangulate survey data with other relevant school indicator data
- Transparency – **share results** with stakeholders
- Engage student and staff voice in **developing improvement plans**
- Track action plan outcomes
- Collect and analyze **follow up** survey and other school indicator data





## **Action - *Inclusive Environments Where All Can Thrive***

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- **Incorporate a data-driven approach**
  - Must be data-driven
  - The impact of the activity/ resource must be assessed (ideally on entire student body)
- **Student Voice**
  - The identified vulnerable or marginalized group must play a role in identifying the activity or resource that is created
  - The identified vulnerable or marginalized group needs to be able to provide on-going feedback and input into the impact and efficacy of the activity or resource – and be able to offer good new ideas (student voice!)
- **Professional Development**
  - Staff need to receive Professional Development that supports the activity/resource/ underlying issue

# Four Social Emotional Learning Approaches

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- SEL program
- SEL infused in academic curriculum
- General teaching strategies/positive classroom climate
- School-wide SEL implementation

# Action - Social Emotional Integrated Unit

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- **Incorporate a data-driven approach**
  - Assess students' social-emotional skills
  - Have regular social-emotional wellness check-ins
- **Best practices**
  - Social-emotional skills learning outcomes within curricular units is a better approach than separate SEL lessons. Although evidence-based SEL programs have been shown to be effective.
  - Developmentally appropriate
  - Culturally responsive
  - Provide on-going professional development for teachers
  - Professional learning communities for teachers
  - Parent/family engagement



# Example - *School Culture and Climate Needs Assessment*

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## Middle School Example

- Comprehensive school climate assessment
  - School Climate Survey (staff, students, parents)
  - Focus groups with diverse students as survey follow up
  - Program inventory
- Began Strategic Planning process co-temporaneously
  - Focus groups with all stakeholder groups
  - Derived common themes re supporting students' needs
- Program assessment process
- Action Plan
- Engaged all key stakeholders

## Example - *Inclusive Environments Where All Can Thrive*

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### Elementary School Example

- Surveyed parents and staff
- Undertook an inventory of programs ***in partnership with the student council***
- The data (program inventory, survey, council meetings) showed that students in the Bilingual program did not have the same access to supports the other students
- Data showed the ELL kids wanted more opportunity to talk with each other and practice their English
- Created an afterschool program to provide the space.
- Kids helped decide the activities – they wanted to play games, – staff was in support since this helped develop social-emotional skills (SEL) the games also focused on developing SEL skills.
- Kids, teachers and parents provide on-going feedback (surveys in both English and Spanish)

## Example - *Inclusive Environments Where All Can Thrive*

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### High School Example

- Concern for less connected and disaffected students
- Surveyed and held focus groups with students
- As a result 2 clubs were reinvigorated to focus on these students
- One originally was focused on creative writing has now expanded to include coffeehouses, 'artsy' events among other things.,
- The other holds weekly student-run meetings based on topics of interest to the students (anime, video games, movies (MCU and DC), manga, and music including video / e-sports tournaments.)
- Students are running these activities and directly involved in their implementation and focus.



## Example - *Social Emotional Integrated Unit*

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### 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Chemistry Unit – Matter, Energy & Sustainability in Living Systems

- Six teachers collaborated on the unit
- SEL skills addressed
  - self-awareness
  - social awareness
  - responsible decision-making
- SEL indicators
  - Accept ownership for decisions that affect the environment
  - Understand the perception of others is essential to develop social awareness.

## Example -*Social Emotional Integrated Unit*

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- Essential questions
  - How do I impact the environment and how does it impact me?
  - Should accepting responsibility for the outcomes of my decisions matter to me? To others?
- Enduring understandings
  - An individual's identity is a product of the dynamic interaction between personal and environmental factors.
  - Understanding oneself is the foundation for self-management.
- Teacher reflections

“SEL was a vital part of the unit because it helps students understand themselves & the consequences of their actions on a global scale.”

# Contact Info

## **Elizabeth Hansen Warner**

- Founder and Co-Director - *School Culture and Climate Initiative*
- President - *SEL4NJ*

## **Patricia Heindel, Ph.D.**

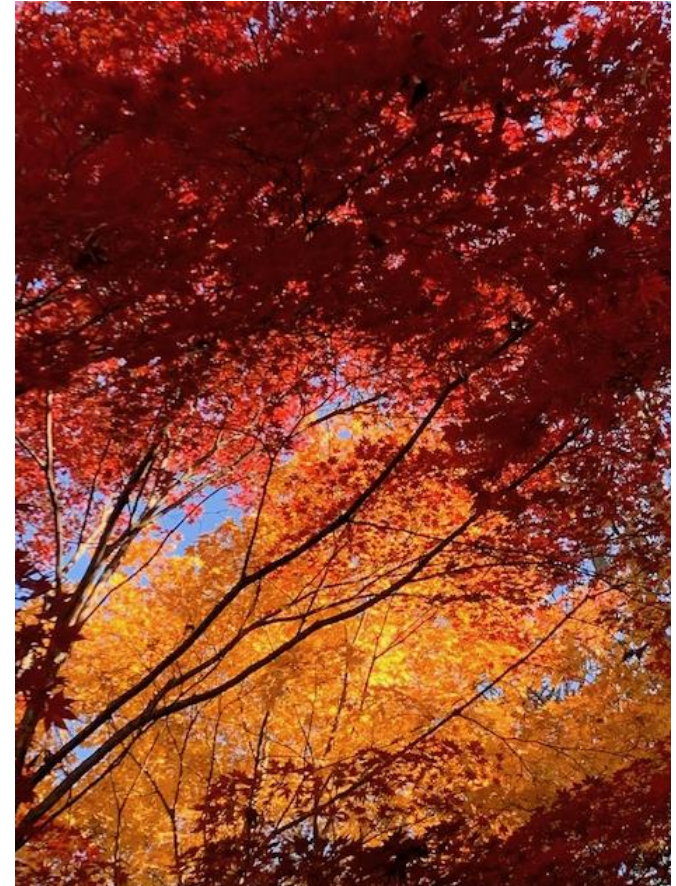
- Founder and Co-Director - *School Culture and Climate Initiative*
- Co-Director - *Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools*
- Vice-President – *SEL4NJ*
- Director - *Center for Human and Social Development*
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# Sustainable Jersey for Schools Underwriters and Sponsors

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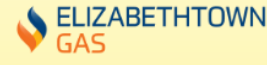
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# SUSTAINABLE JERSEY GRANTS PROGRAM



**PSEG**  
*Foundation*

## New Funding Cycle Announced!

- \$100,000 is available to New Jersey public schools participating in the Sustainable Jersey for Schools programs
  - \$2k and \$10k grants to fund sustainability projects and support your green team

### Informational Webinar

3-4pm on  
Thursday,  
**December 15,  
2022**

### Application Deadline

By 11:59pm  
on Friday,  
**March 10,  
2023**

### Award Notifications

By **early May 2023** with an event in **early June 2023**

### Performance Period

**10k Grants:**  
18 months  
**2k Grants:**  
12 months

Learn More & Apply







# Thank You!

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