



HARTLAND CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS

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Dear HCS Education Community:

Welcome to the 2022-23 school year. I hope this first HCS Community Update of the new school year finds you and your families rested and well. It is my intention to regularly provide updates to you with pertinent information from the district. We look forward to the start of school on Wednesday, August 17, 2022.

What Will the District Teach Regarding Social Emotional Learning: Over the past year there has been concerns shared regarding what the district interprets as social emotional learning. I have included a thorough review of What is Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in Hartland Schools? at the end of this update. I feel it is important to share what the district teaches so that there is no mistaking our approach to this work to counter unfounded rumors. Please take some time to learn what this means to district staff and feel free to reach out to me with any concerns that you might have. I appreciate that detail is essential, and hope this information clarifies for those who oppose the work we are doing.

Department of Justice Follow-up Resolution: In the Spring of 2020, it was reported that there were inappropriate harassment and discriminatory behaviors at the high school. The Michigan Department Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) investigated these allegations. They did not find any evidence that district staff failed to address known incidents. They did however finalize a recommendation for the district to complete in order to feel confident that this investigation can be closed. The DOJ has requested that HCS looks more closely at the climate of the district pertaining to the issue of discrimination and harassment with an emphasis on racial discrimination. As part of this resolution, HCS agreed to complete a school climate survey of students, parents, and staff. I want to thank you ahead of time for helping us to bring resolution to the afore mentioned investigation, and for completing any surveys that you may receive this fall. The surveys will address the school and district climate around harassment with an emphasis on race, inclusiveness of all students, the safety of the educational environment, and the effectiveness of measures taken to address any past concerns identified. We will use the survey data to create a plan to address and monitor the concerns noted in the survey data while inviting students to discuss their experiences around racial harassment. The expectation is that district staff always act promptly and effectively to any student or parent concerns. The DOJ has made it clear that the district must track harassment incidents and train students and staff in what harassment is; and make it known that any incident will be addressed quickly without exception. I know that our students and staff will respond to this work accordingly, and work together to create the environment that we can all be proud of.

While we unconditionally embrace every student in our school district without exception, we also have a fiscal responsibility to the community when it comes to following the law. Did you know that our school district receives federal funding for many different programs including Title I, Title II, Title III, Title IV, School Lunch Program, etc.? One of the key stipulations to receiving federal funds is that the district must have and must follow clear non-discrimination policies. If it is determined that the district does not follow these policies or fails to act on incidents of discrimination or harassment, the OCR and the DOJ get involved. In other words, the district could be penalized for a failure to provide a safe and welcoming environment for all students. This means that federal funding could and likely would be withheld. In the 2021-22 school year 4.9% or \$3,037,504 of our general fund budget was supplemented from federal

sources. If we add the \$2,657,711 for student nutrition programs and \$666,173 to supplement our debt service payments, it equates to well over \$6,300,000. While this is a secondary issue of not following the law and doing what is right for every student and staff member in our community, it is a negative consequence which is not desirable in any way.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Chuck Hughes".

Chuck Hughes

What is Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in Hartland Schools?

The Hartland Consolidated School District has long been involved in creating affective student goals that develop healthy living skills (relating to moods, feelings, and attitudes).

We all remember our teachers talking to us about concepts such as “positive self-esteem,” being in school regularly to limit chronic absenteeism (great school attendance develops great on-the-job attendance), cooperative classroom learning to develop collaborative job skills, etc.

In the past, you may have heard the terms 21st Century or soft skills, which identify the skills necessary to be successful in a global society. While the terms are ever changing, JK-12 schooling has always been committed to helping students succeed beyond the classroom. Terms you may remember are listed below:

creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity, thinking critically, social skills

This work continues to be foundational in our efforts to develop the “whole child”, and to ensure that our students practice and learn the skills they will need to be active citizens while building a school culture where all students feel valued and accepted.

In the 2021-22 student survey of 7th-12th graders, 34% of students shared that they have been bullied in school. This is not acceptable to any of our staff. We believe that parents expect the school staff to address the needs of their children to which the district humbly accepts this expectation. We believe in a “whole child” approach to educating the children of this community.

Where does the district draw their resources from to engage in this work?

District staff regularly read books and articles, view online resources, attend professional development opportunities, and engage in conversations with each other and staff from other school districts within the county and state. We have adopted the competencies from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) which address the following areas:

- **Self-Awareness:** The ability to accurately recognize one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. Also, the ability to accurately assess one’s own strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a “growth mindset.” [HCS teachers teach students to use grit rather than allowing students to give up and say they cannot do something which is a “fixed mindset” approach.](#)
- **Self-Management:** The ability to successfully regulate one’s own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations – effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. This includes the ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals. [HCS teachers teach toward empowering students to manage their emotions and persevere through difficulty.](#)
- **Social Awareness:** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and support. [HCS teaches this concept through the idea that students can and should be able to self-regulate, which we refer to as a means of empowerment.](#)

- **Relationship Skills**: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This is also the ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed. [HCS approaches this through the teaching of empathy and advocacy for self and others.](#)
- **Responsible Decision-Making**: The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. This is a realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others. [HCS approaches this through the teaching of our 3R's.](#)

While we have adopted these competencies, we pride ourselves on “Hartlandizing or making it our own” approach. We embed our work into the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) which identify strategies to help students learn these skills in Tier 1 (effective for 80% or more of students), Tier 2 (effective for the 5-10% who still need help), and Tier 3 (strategies that are focused for the 1-5% of students struggling with developing the skills we are teaching).

What skills make up the district's work in teaching SEL?

- The district works hard to align this learning with our guiding tenets of the **3R's** -Reason, Respect and Responsibility and the **EAGLES** platform made up of Empathy, Achievement, Grit, Link, Empowerment, and Service.
- Teach students how to pause, reflect and make responsible decisions. **(3R's)**
- Teach students that a growth mindset (I cannot do it YET) is more powerful than a fixed mindset, or “I cannot nor will I ever be able to do this”. **(GRIT)**
- Teach students the importance of being honest while embracing integrity or doing the right thing even when others are not watching. **(EMPOWERMENT)**
- Help students to think deeply about their emotions and things that trigger their responses of anger, sadness, happiness, etc., or zones of regulation such as “I am having a BAD day due to” **(EMPOWERMENT)**
- Help students understand what it means to understand how others feel. **(EMPATHY)**
- Teach students how to develop individualized goals and ways to monitor them. **(EMPOWERMENT)**
- Teach students skills for resolving conflict. **(EMPOWERMENT)**
- Help students learn how to advocate for themselves or others regarding physical, social, emotional, behavioral, and mental concerns. **(EMPATHY and SERVICE)**
- Teach students how to be safe in an online world. **(EMPOWERMENT)**
- Teach students age appropriate health and hygiene skills. **(EMPOWERMENT)**
- Help students to manage impulsive behaviors in favor of self-control. **(3R's)**
- Help students to learn relationship building skills. **(EMPOWERMENT)**

The work described above is done to help every student overcome barriers that may keep them from being successful and productive community members in our global society.

Why does the approach to teaching these skills include the words Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion?

- **Diversity** references the need to understand a diverse group which includes students from a low socioeconomic background, students who happen to have a disability, and people of color other than Caucasian.
 - Often the resources share the need to invest in hiring a diverse workforce to better understand the diverse needs of all children.
- **Equity** references the need to understand that equality is not always the norm in working with the special needs of all children.
 - Sometimes equity refers to more time needed such as the MTSS approach described earlier. Equity can also refer to the need to add support personnel to one building over that of another because such a building has a larger at-risk or low socioeconomic population and they need more support staff.
- **Inclusion** references the need to include all children in the process, not just those who may easily handle the learning.
 - In our schools, we work hard to include all children in a general education setting wherever possible instead of denoting students to specialized rooms. We work to include all students in a full complement of activities regardless of their wealth status by offering pay-to-play scholarships.

We believe that every parent wants the best for their child, without exception.

I think you will find in this information that nowhere does the district teach or plan to teach toward shaming, blaming, or guiltning children. We do not accept the caring for children from this vantage point. My hope is that I have helped to clarify any misconceptions about what social emotional learning is in the Hartland Consolidated School District.

Feel free to contact me with any questions you might still have.